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Vol. XI.

\$2.50
a Year.

Published Weekly by Beadle and Adams,
No. 98 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK.

Price,
Five Cents.

No. 141.



NEARER—NEARER TO THE BOAT SHE PULLED, STRONGLY AND STEADILY.

New York Nell,

The BOY-GIRL DETECTIVE:

OR,
OLD BLAKESLY'S MONEY.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSE-BUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE BLAKESLY COMES TO TOWN.

"PAPERS! papers! *Herald*, *Times*, *Chronicle* and *Sun*! Buy one, mister?"

And the newsboy paused in his parade through one of the Market street cars, to hold a freshly printed daily under the nose of Mr. Redmond Blakesly, retired merchant, who chanced to be one of the passengers.

"Well! well! my boy, I suppose I might as well humor you," he replied, "although I already have a pocket full. What's your name, my lad? You look like a girl."

"Phew! you're mighty sharp at guessin', Governor. But, tra! la! I'll see you again."

And hastily out of the car the nimble news-dealer skipped, in time to jump upon the tender of a westward bound "dummy," which was passing.

Uncle Redmond Blakesly put on his spectacles, went to the door, and took a long look at the retreating car.

"Well! well! well!" he muttered. "Blast my old eyes!"

"What's the matter, Cap? Didn't git took in by the little cuss, did you?" the conductor asked, with a grin; whereat Uncle Redmond shifted his gaze to him.

"No, youngster, I did not. By the way, I look a little verdant, don't I, compared wi' the city folk?"

"Yes—that is, you look as if you had just come from up-country," the man of the bell-punch replied, with a smile.

"S'pose I do," the retired merchant assented; "but, for all that, my boy, just chalk it down that the old gent ain't picked up for a fool, every day, an' ain't half so green as some of you city snobs who laughs at him. Who was the youngster with the papers, my friend?"

"She? Oh! that was a new one they've got on the force—a gal, by the way, just over from N. Y. Nell Niblo, she calls herself, and they do say she's reg'lar smart."

"Oh! they do, eh?" and Uncle Redmond scratched the bald portion of his head reflectively. "Well! well! well! who ever heard of a girl dressin' up in boy's clothes, an' sellin' newspapers? Humph! it's shameful what poverty will fetch folks to."

"Why, old man, you talk as if you never had known want?"

"No, I don't talk nothin' o' the sort, youngster, fer I'd be tellin' lies, an' them's ag'in' my honest, orthodox principles. Thar uster be the time when 'Red Black' had hard luck, an' slept where night overtook him. Ye see, young feller, I'm Redmond Blakesly, from Hudsonale,

up on the Rudson River, an' I uster live in ther city, jes' as well as you, an' they called me Red Black. Times have changed, tho', an' nobody recognizes in the hale, hearty, and well-to-do country gentleman, the former 'honest dealer of Chatham street.' Purty place, this Philadelphia?"

"The Keystone city of them all," the conductor replied, now courteously.

"Yes. I uster run over heer when I did business in New York," and something like a sorrowful expression came over his face, as the old fellow stumped along back into the car, and became seated.

Uncle Redmond Blakesly did look rather "green," taken at first glance. He was of medium height, and portly, his fat dumplings of legs, apparently inadequate to the task of supporting his trunk, as he walked with a heavy cane. His face also was fat and florid, and good-natured in its expression, with a fringe of straggling white beard under his chin, and hair to match upon his head, except directly on the top, where was a shining bald spot.

His attire consisted of a pair of coarse boots, which had been polished; a pair of linen trowsers, too short in the legs; a vest of the same material, too small to encompass his great girth; and an old gray overcoat, that had evidently seen years of usage, and that, in spite of the fact that it was now the sultry August weather. His head was ornamented with a broad-rimmed Panama hat, and his eyes shaded by spectacles.

Taken at a glance, he looked a hale and hearty down-East farmer, and was the source of considerable amusement to a few of the "nobs" in the car, who were not careful in making remarks about the country and its natural advantages.

But, if Uncle Redmond heard, he heeded not, having the satisfaction of knowing that he suited himself and his friends, and was able to pull through life, despite these differences between the city nabob and the country gentleman.

About an hour later he left the Thirteenth and Fifteenth street line of cars at the P. W. & Baltimore railway station, and entered the large and elegant depot which is one of the features of South Broad street.

The train had already arrived, and the waiting-rooms were filled with passengers—old, middle-aged and young of both sexes, and many nationalities.

Among them was a young man of effeminate appearance, faultlessly attired in navy-blue, with spotless white shirt, collar, vest, silk tie, white silk hat, kid gloves, patent-leather walking shoes, and gold-headed cane—a very dandified personage of some twenty-one summers, with a fair face of attractive cast, light blue eyes, brown hair, and a faint mustache of a towy color.

He carried a sachel and duster with his right hand, while on his left arm leaned a lady, attired in a gray duster, pretty hat and vail, the latter being drawn down over her face, screening it from view.

Both evidently were strangers in the city, for they paused, in seeming hesitation, until the young man's gaze rested upon Uncle Redmond

Blakesly, when his face lit up with an expression of recognition, and he led the way forward to where the countryman was standing.

"Excuse me, sir," the young man accosted him, "but can it be possible that I am addressing my jolly old dad, Redmond Blakesly?"

Uncle Redmond stared a little, and gave the young man a critical survey through his glasses.

"Well! well! well! I don't know about that, sir," he replied, taking off his hat and scratching his bald spot. "I'm Red Black, that's sure—red when I'm angry; black when I'm mad, as the boys used to say. Yes, youngster, I'm Redmond Blakesly, from Hudsondale, on the Hudson. And, next to that, who in the world are you?"

"Your own son, Jack Blakesly, alive and well, after an absence of eight years," was the laughing response, and the new-comer put forth his hand warmly.

But Uncle Red shoved his down' into the pockets of his pantaloons with a quiet little laugh.

"Just hold on, boy. The old man is jest as smart as he used to be, ef he is a little older, an' he ain't goin' to be took in on sharps. You tell me you're my boy, Jack Blakesly—you?"

"Why, certainly, my royal dad—of course I am! Didn't I write you I'd be here to-day—the prodigal returned, after many years? Of course I'm Jack, just the same as I was years ago, when I was kindly booted out, and told to go make my own fortune."

"Well, have you made it?" the proprietor of Hudsondale demanded.

"Not a red! Every cent I have been able to get hold of I have spent on education."

Blakesley, Sr., closed one eye obliquely.

"Are you certain about that?" he demanded.

"Positive!" the young man protested. "I can converse in seven languages, and am competent to handle the professorship of a college."

"That settles it," Uncle Redmond cried, slapping his thigh, delightedly. "I recognize you, fer my Jack he was allus fer study! study! study an' eddication, an' allus would ruther loaf around town, at school, or in ther free readin'-rooms, than ter stay up-country an' hill pertaters. I uster git so 'tarnal out o' patience, an' when he told me he wasn't goin' to farm it, but was a-goin' to shirk fer hisself, I give him fifty dollars, an' told him not to cum' back till he hed got all ther book larnin' he wanted."

And seizing the young man's hand, the old chap wrung it in a way that made his returned offspring wince.

"Yes, I'm thunderin' glad you're back to keep your old dad company, boy," Uncle Redmond pursued, "fer ye see, ye can be a heap o' comfort to me. I ain't a poor farmer no more, by a long shot, nuther. They uster count old Red Black a sorter greenhorn, wi' the barnyard clingin' to his boots; but I went inter a leetle mercantile speckilation, an' furst I know'd, I went out ag'in, ownin' a mansion up on ther Hudson, a city residence, an' a plump leetle nest-egg, asides. So ye see ther old dad's fixed, arter all, an' thing's is a-goin' to be gay when we all git up at Hudsondale. To be sure, Prudence is

gittin' old an' vinegary, like all old maids do, but I reckon she'll 'liven up, when she sees you back. But, see hyar, Jack, thar's one p'int I'd like ter ask ye about—can ye spel'?"

"Well, I should presume so," Jack replied, a little sarcastically. "Educated people generally know how to spell."

"Well! well! I s'pose so. Didn't know about it, you know. You see yer old dad never had much success at wras'lin' wi' the spellin'-book, tho' he ked allus leave off, ahead. Yas, I s'pose you must know how ter spell, an' hev heaps of larnin' besides. Why, I'd near fergot it, boy; I see'd a trained hog down ter Barnum's show, in Brooklyn, last year, what could spell, an' tell the time o' day. It's astonishin' what this world is comin' to. But, come, boy, ye hain't given me a knock-down tew the lady, heer. Who is she? Hain't been gittin' married?"

"Oh! no," young Blakesly replied, glancing around him, uneasily, and noting that Uncle Redmond's hearty manner was attracting attention.

And not only attention, but many curious glances.

"No, I am not married. This young lady allow me to introduce to you as Miss Viola Vernon. She is a homeless orphan, whose people were recently killed by a railroad accident out West, and being acquainted with her, and knowing her circumstances, I took the liberty to bring her home with me, as a guest of Aunt Prudence, until she can get tidings of a brother, who lives somewhere in the East. Show him your face, Viola."

The young lady accordingly raised her vail, and turned her face full upon Uncle Redmond, who gave vent to a prolonged whistle of surprise.

"Well! well! well!" you're a beauty, and no mistake!" he ejaculated. "Durn my eyes, ef you don't take the glimp off 'n any of our Eastern gals!"

Miss Vernon was indeed remarkably pretty, with a fair face, dusky eyes, and brown hair, her power of attraction lying chiefly in a fascinating smile, which she knew well how to use.

"I fancy she would resemble my poor little sister, who was stolen away, years ago, if we could find her," young Blakesly said. "But, come! tell us what hotel you stop at, and we will seek it, after I attend to a little business, in town. Do not put yourself to any trouble to show us, as we can easily find it, if you give us the proper directions."

"I put up at the Girard, on Chestnut street, boy. You will find me there later."

"Ah! yes. Thanks. We will soon join you there," then bowing, Jack led his fair companion away toward the carriage stand.

After they were gone, Uncle Redmond shut one eye, and spat a volume of tobacco-juice at an unobtrusive fly which was crawling along on the floor. It was a fashion the honest but illiterate old gent had, when in a study.

"I wonder if I don't smell a rat?" he murmured, taking off his hat, and scratching his bald spot. "Guess maybe the boy was a leetle ashamed o' his old dad's togs, an' was afraid to be seen in my company, for fear he'd get laughed at. Well! well! that's the way the world wags."

But, let it wag. Old Red Black's honest, an' straight, an' that suits him."

Still the master of Hudsonale seemed considerably "cut" by what he had rightly drawn as a conclusion, and paced to and fro about the waiting-room, some time in deep meditation.

He was thus engaged, when he was startled by a familiar voice crying:

"Papers! *Herald, Times, Chronicle, Sun, Star!*" and turned quickly to see the same newspaper girl, whom he had seen a short time before on the Market street cars, just in the act of passing.

A girl she was, too, he discerned at a second glance, her face betraying femininity.

In form she was scarcely of woman's medium height, but well rounded and graceful, and sprightly of movement. In face she was decidedly girlish and pretty, her features being round and charmingly chiseled, the mouth in particular wearing a roguish, spirited expression, and the eyes a brilliant, independent flash, that betrayed a nature at once gay and happy, yet bold, fearless, and scorning wrong and evil-doing.

Her hair was of a golden hue, and curled in a close mass about her head, which added to her pretty appearance.

In the way of attire, she wore a slouch hat upon her head, and rough pants, vest and jacket of coarse brown woolen, a checkered shirt without any collar, and a pair of rather coarse shoes upon her small feet, which were much too large for them.

Taken as a whole, and not forgetting that her face was somewhat dirty, and that she was smoking the stump of a cigar, she was about as good a specimen of a street Arab as one could have found in all the Quaker City, the importance with which she strutted about giving her the appearance of one of the urchins she personated.

What her age was no ordinary observer could guess, probably, for while her form and manners belonged to a girl of seventeen or eighteen, her face and its expression were those of one less than sixteen.

As he saw her passing him, Uncle Redmond put out his hand, involuntarily, and detained her.

"Hold on, my dear," he said. "Ain't you the one I bought a paper of this morning?"

"You bet I am! There ain't another gal what peddles papers, in this town o' Philadelph', as I know of," was the roguish reply. "Why? what's the rip? Wasn't the paper all right?"

"I s'pose so; but, that ain't what I want. I want ter hav a little chat with you."

"Oh! that's it, eh? Well, I'd just as lieve chirrup with you as any other good-looking feller. What's your name?"

"My name? Well, I'm Redmond Blakesly, of Hudsonale, up the Hudson. And who are you?"

"Me? Oh! I'm New York Nell, the news girl. Niblo is my name, when I'm to home, tho' I don't hear any relationship to Niblo's Garden. Used to live over in York, but had to skip out, because I p'isened a butcher's big ugly dog, an' the cops was going to put me in the Tombs. Oh! I tell you I'm a tough youngster, for my age!"

"Well! well! I should say so. But, somehow, I kinder take to you. Can't you get more profit-

table employment than dressin' up in boy's clothes, and peddlin' papers?"

"Nix! it's what suits me. I like the togs first rate, because a person can get around ship-shape, much better. If you want to play ball wi' the boys, run a foot race, or do most ennything, these togs is enough sight handier than skirts. And as for sellin' newspapers, I make a dollar or two a day, an' learn heaps to help me in my biz, too."

"Your biz?"

"Yes, my biz."

"What's that?"

"That's a secret of my own, but I'll confide it to you, as you seem to be a sort of honest pal, an' I guess you won't give it away. I'm a detective."

"A detective?"

"Precisely! Identically a detective. Oh! you bet I make a sharp one, too. What I can't nose out, there ain't many as can. I'm a rogues' terror, an' they all know me by heart, over in York, and are beginning to find me out here in Philadelph. Got any detective business you want executed with neatness and dispatch? If so, I'm your ferret."

"No, I guess I haven't any thing to be detected," Uncle Red replied. "But I'd like you to dress in proper attire, and come up to Hudsonale and pay us a visit."

"Get out. D'y'e s'pose I'd throw away my togs jest for one visit? No sir-ee! If I ain't good enough to come a-visitin' in breeches, I ain't good enough to come at all."

"But, my gracious! Prudence she'd faint clean away if she'd see a woman dressed up in men's clothes!"

"But I ain't a woman; I'm only a gal. They call me a little cuss over in York, 'cause I allus hoe out my own row, an' keer fer No. 1. Who's Prudence?"

"She's my sister."

"An old maid, ain't she, sourer than pickles in the month of June?"

"Well! well! Blast my eyes ef you hain't hit it purty straight. But did you see my boy, a bit ago?"

"What! the sickly lookin' feller with the gal a singing to him?"

"Yes. That's my boy, Jack, whom I started out eight years ago, to make his way in the world."

"Humph! Guess he hain't never paralyzed any one, judging by his looks. Kinder like me to come up to Hudsonale, an' fall in love with, and marry him, wouldn't you?"

"Just my thought, my girl, sure's I'm an honest but illiterate old chap!" the master of Hudsonale admitted, slapping his knee. "How old are you, child?"

"Dunno. Guess I never knew. Old mother Niblo never would tell me, and one day she slipped her wind, and her spirit took a waltz. 'Spect I'm old enough to not marry sech a sick-looking squash as that feller you say's your son."

"Then you don't like the looks of him?"

"Not much! I allus form my likes and dislikes purty quick, an' I set that chap down as a snide, the minnit I clapped my eyes onto him."

"Well! well! that's strange. Dunno much about him, myself. You see, the boy's been

away eight years, an' I don't know jest what he's like. He was only thirteen when he cleared out, an' his poor old dad never heard a word until a few days ago, when he writ fer me to meet him here. But he sez he's spent every cent he's made on eddication, an' is awful smart!"

"I'll bet he is," with a sarcastic grimace. "He looks as if he know'd more than some hull book binderies. I say, uncle, ain't you a little bit green, an' liable to be took in?"

The old man locked grave, and at the same time scratched the bald spot on top of his head.

"Well! well! well! I don't know," he muttered, slowly. "Mebbe I ain't so smart as I used ter be, though I've allus counted old Red Black about as chipper as the average. Why, gal?"

"Because it strikes me—but never mind. I'll give you my opinion some other time. In the meanwhile I'll make observations an' report by an' by. Am goin' back to N. Y. to-morrer. If you ever happen in town when I'm there, jest tell any o' the b. b.'s or n. b.'s you want to see New York Nell, and they'll put you on track. Tra! la! la! Take care of yourself, now, and don't let that son of yours bleed your pocket-book."

And then, with a laugh, she walked away.

CHAPTER II.

"CHAMPAGNE QUITE THE THING."

OLD Uncle Redmond Blakesly had not guessed wrongly, when he concluded that Jack was ashamed of his sire's rough-and-ready appearance, and had filled in the excuse of having some business elsewhere to attend to, in order that the old gent should not accompany him, for the young man had gone direct to the Girard Hotel.

"Is there an old chap stopping here by the name of Redmond Blakesly?" he asked, as he registered his name.

"Yes, certainly," the clerk replied, politely. "You will find his name registered with today's arrivals. Believe he is out just now."

"Oh! that does not matter. I have already seen him. Just arrived from the West, and met him at the depot, and he directed me to stop here, at his expense."

"Ah! yes. He left orders to that effect," and the clerk touched a call bell. "This boy will show you to your apartments."

They were given an elegant suite of rooms upon the third landing, consisting of bedchambers and private parlor, all richly furnished.

Jack Blakesly threw himself upon a sofa in the parlor with a lazy yawn, while Miss Vernon was removing her wrappings.

"Well, my dear, how do you fancy the master of Hudsonale?" he asked, quizzically. "Think he resembles his dutiful offspring any?"

"I did not see any marked resemblance," Viola replied, quietly. "I should judge, however, that Mr. Blakesly would be a nice man to get along with—an easy, good-natured man, of liberal and indulgent habits."

"You refer to the younger Blakesly?"

"No; to the elder. You are not at all of the same nature as the man you introduced to me as your father."

"Thank heaven for that! He looks like a regular old codger more than the master to Hudsonale. Did you mind how nicely I got rid of him up at the depot? I was ashamed to have folks suspect any connection between us, and so shook him. Of course he was too thick-headed to know the difference."

"Maybe, and again maybe not. I hope we can keep on the right side of him. Have you seen Colonel Baxter?"

"No. He got off the cars at the first station out of town, intending to hire a cab and drive in. I guess he had no desire to meet the old gent at the depot, for fear a scene might ensue."

"What is the secret about this matter? Does Baxter fear Blakesly?"

"It would seem so. There is some old grudge between them, which I do not know."

"Then, tell me, truthfully, and for the last time, do you believe you are the son of this old countryman?" Miss Vernon asked with a strange eagerness, the meaning of which it would have been hard to interpret.

"Yes, I do," Jack replied. "Up to the age of fourteen years, or rather, previous to that date in my existence, I have no recollection whatever. My first remembrance is of being in Baxter's care, at about the age I named, and from that time up the present, he has ever taught me that I am the son of Redmond Blakesly, who booted me out upon the world when young to shift for myself."

Miss Vernon was silent as she gazed out of a front window upon the street below. Her pretty brows were knitted in an expression that was inexplicable.

"I have no choice but to believe you," she said finally. "But I have sometimes been assailed with a fear that both you and Baxter were arrant knaves. How are you responsible? You might fail to fill your promises, and there would be a pretty state of affairs."

"Bah! you need have no apprehension on that score. You have seen the old man, and taken a liking to—his coffers! Ha! ha! I have yet to meet the woman that gold will not tempt. Once we get safely to Hudsonale, your conquest will be easy with the old man, and, first we know, you'll be my step-mother instead of my betrothed, as you are now. By and by the old gent will waltz off and leave you and I the masters of the situation—and a very soft snap it is, too—much better than doing a song-and-dance for ten dollars a week at the Bella Union in Cheyenne! Ha! ha!"

Miss Vernon scowled. She evidently did not like the reference.

"Perhaps," she said. "But, if I do not succeed, either you or Baxter will have to pay back the money you have borrowed of me, or there will be another tragedy for the morning papers to chronicle."

And the young woman shut her lips tightly in a way that detracted somewhat from her beauty, while Jack Blakesly smiled vaguely to himself, as he tipped back in his chair and lit a choice cigar.

Uncle Redmond Blakesly arrived at the Girard just before dinner hour that evening, and in accordance with a life-long custom, stepped up to

the bar and took a glass of ale, "just for an appetizer." More than three glasses of any kind of drink never found their way down the sturdy old farmer's throat per day, and it was one of his favorite boasts that no one had ever seen old Red Black when he could not walk as straight as a bee-line.

"Well! well! Philadelphia is gittin' to be a big town, I declare," he said, as the barkeeper was pouring out his beverage. "The old man's been takin' a good look over it, you see, on foot, an' is pretty well tuckered out. S'pose my boy Jack's been around?"

"Ah, yes. Quite a fine young fellow, and a good judge of champagne in the bargain."

"Champagne?" Uncle Redmond gasped, putting up his hands. "My Jack don't drink champagne?"

"Ah! yes; certainly. It's quite the thing among the young men of the day to take a couple of bottles just after luncheon."

"Oh! is it, eh? Well! well! things have changed since I was young. And you say my boy Jack has been guilty of drinking champagne?"

"Merely two bottles—that's all, you know. A friend came along whom he knew, and he simply did the courteous."

"Hang the courteous! I'll have to see to this. He paid for it, I s'pose?"

"No, not exactly—that is, he said just dot it down to you, and it would be all right!"

Uncle Blakesly brought his cane down upon the counter with a vehemence that made things jingle.

"Well! well! well! The impudence of the boy is astonishin'!" he cried, gruffly. "Mind you, sir, no more of this. If the young scapegoat wants champagne to drink, he must pay for it. How much for what he has had? I'll pay for it, and it'll be the last you can set down to ther old man, an' don't ye fergit it. Up in the quarter of the globe where I was born, every feller paid for his own toddy, an' ef they ain't got uster them ideas down beer, it's high time they was a-l'arnin'. How much fer that champagne, bark'er?"

"Only five dollars to you, Mr. Blakesly. Six is the regular price for two bottles, but I will break the usual custom, since this has been rather an unexpected honor to you."

"Six fiddlesticks! Here's your money, bark'er, an' now do ye mind not to charge anything more to Redmond Blakesly."

And the sturdy old ruralist slapped a five-dollar gold piece upon the counter, and walked away.

"So Jack be a drinkin' chap, eh?" he murmured, as he sauntered about. "Well, well; it ain't much more than the old man has expected these many year. The boy was allus a wild 'un, an' w'at's born in the blood can't be erradicated wi' beech gads nor tongue-lashin's. A nice feller to rule Hudsonale, arter ther old man's dead an' gone! Humph! we'll see about et—yes, yes! we will see about that, ef we aire gettin' old and sorter off our track, like a played out plow."

About an hour later Jack Blakesly sauntered down into the lounging-room of the hotel, airily

attired in a suit of spotless duck, with patent-leather slippers on his feet, and a silk hat on his head.

He purchased a choice cigar at the stand, and then threw himself into a great lounging chair before one of the open windows that looked out upon Chestnut street.

He was hot long thus positioned ere he was tapped familiarly upon the shoulder, and a man drew a chair near by, and became seated.

He was tall and of commanding figure, with a face in which was expressed cunning, self-conceit, and an evil nature; and this face was ornamented with a heavy black mustache which connected with a bushy crop of side whiskers; his hair was black, his complexion dark; even his attire was black throughout.

Jack Blakesly uttered a grunt of surprise at sight of him.

"So you're back, eh?" he said. "So is the old man Blakesly."

"So I heard," the dark man replied.

"Just heard about his raising the deuce over your champagne bill. You may as well dry up your fountain-head now. No more champy at his expense."

"Ha! is he angry, then?"

"Yes. How does the coast lie, now?"

"I'll be hanged if I know. Guess it will all work out right. If it doesn't, you are the loser, not I. Fancy your chagrin at a total defeat, Colonel Baxter!"

The dark man gritted his teeth, and scowled a trifle.

"I do not intend to court defeat," he said, with an evil grin. "Flem Baxter has played in dramas, before, and played in heavy parts, too, in which he has always come out the victor. Consequently, he is not to be cast for any parts inferior, nor where there is not a moral certainty of his winning."

"But the old country elk isn't so green as he looks. You'd best play low, Jack and sure," young Blakesly suggested, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "I've always noticed that the more carelessly you fool around a country bumble-bee, the more likely you are to get stung."

"Never fear on that score; I and Redmond Blakesly have met before. And, betwixt you and me, the old man dare not say his soul is his own, when I remind him. But I do not desire to approach him this way, unless he gets unruly. Always tempt a horse first, and reserve the whip for the emergency. How about Viola? Is she getting uneasy?"

"A little, I guess. She thinks there is some villainy in the matter, and that we are trying to swindle old Blakesly."

"Ah! this is bad. She must be disarmed of that suspicion, or our influence over her is at an end. One point is for you to arrange: Keep her at ease; another: Get packed off for Hudsonale as soon as possible."

"For what? The city is much preferable to the odor of rural barnyards."

"You mistake. Hudsonale is no such place as you imagine. They tell me it is one of the most charming resorts along the Hudson. It will be better for you there, where no one can interrupt you in soft-soaping the old man."

"Well, you are the master—I the servant. I

must obey. I am none too sanguine of success, however."

"Bah! you are weak-minded. I have given you your lines, see that you act them well, or I'll no longer be responsible for your welfare, and keep the wolves from your door."

"I will perform according to your directions. If the girl gets unmanageable, it will not be my fault."

"I will attend to her, myself. We must get another deposit, and then, if she gets dissatisfied, either let her go, or shut her up."

"It would not do to let her loose. She'd hunt up that hot-tempered Southern brother of hers, and the mischief would be to pay for a certainty."

"True. And were it not that he is already on the chase, I would shove her in as Blakesly's long-lost daughter!"

"She wouldn't hear to it. She is too scrupulously honest."

"Bah! Money and position are what she craves, or she would never have backed our little enterprise with her fortune, in hopes of marrying the heir of Hudsondale. But I have not much time to talk on this subject, now, for there is danger in another direction which demands my attention."

"Where?"

"In New York."

"From what source?"

"From the Colorado mines."

"What! not the real Jack?"

"Exactly! the genuine and original!"

"How did you learn this?"

"From Sharky, whom I sent to ferret him out, ere I came East. It seems that he's got his fill, up in the mines, and is coming on to see his father."

"And is in New York?"

"Rather, is liable to arrive there, at most any minute. Sharky telegraphed me that he was close at his heels, in Chicago."

"Where are the others—Mose Barker and Johnny Fish?"

"Laying low in N. Y., watching for him. Also for Monk, of Leadville."

Jack Blakesly grew pale.

"What! is he coming on?"

"Yes. But he'll find he's tackled game out of his sphere—tigers, instead of common prairie wolves. Ha! ha!"

"What are you going to do with the other? He'll be dangerous?"

"Scarcely. He'll find New York too large for him, when he gets there. He must suspend breathing as quickly and quietly as he arrives."

Blakesly shook his head, rather dubiously.

"It looks to me like a desperate undertaking," he demurred, "and, ten to one, we lose."

"Fifty to one we do not," Baxter responded, confidently. "All that remains is to keep on the right side of the old man, and not let him get suspicious. If, however, he does get suspicious, we must put our heads together and work. I'm off to New York, now, to look out for the game. Get packed off for Hudsondale as soon as you can."

"I will see to it. Report soon."

"Of course."

Then Baxter arose and sauntered away.

But he was destined not to leave the hotel undisturbed.

In the bar-room of the hotel he came face to face with Uncle Redmond Blakesly, the two halting at a respectable distance as if by a mutual impulse.

The colonel gazed at the ruralist in his coolly cynical way. Uncle Red flushed angrily, a determined, belligerent light shining from his eyes as he grasped his heavy cane, firmly.

"Ah! really! is this you, Uncle Blakesly? It is an unexpected honor to meet you," Baxter said, putting out his hand and adopting a pleasant smile for the occasion.

"Oh! it is, is it," and Uncle Blakesly gave a grim stare. "Mebbe, by the time I tan yer infernal jacket fer ye, Fleming Baxter et won't be quite so much of a pleasure. Do ye want I should try it, an' see?"

"Oh! no, I won't put you to that trouble," the other replied, sneeringly.

"'Twon't be no trouble at all, an' blame me ef I wouldn't do it, ef I had ye out somewhere, whar I could unloosen myself. But, never mind, Flem—the old man's hale at sixty, an' he's goin' ter live long enuff ter peel yer hide yet, an' you recollect it. Ther day ain't fur off, nuther."

"This is a strange greeting to come from an old-time friend and schoolmate," and Baxter well feigned surprise.

"Friend?" uncle Red gasped, wiping the perspiration from his bald spot. "When were you ever my friend, Flem Baxter? Didn't we allususter be fightin', an' quarrelin'? Didn't you steal away my poor misguided sister, an' abuse her until she was glad ter lay down an' die to git rid of you? Oh! Flem, ye'll find ther old man hes got just as good memory as he had five-an'-forty years ago!"

Baxter gazed round him with a quick, nervous glance, but gave a sigh of relief, when he saw that their conversation had attracted no notice.

"See here, you accursed fool, do you know what you are saying?" he hissed, fiercely, taking a step toward the master of Hudsondale. "You may have forgotten that *you* are afraid of me."

"I afraid of you?" Uncle Blakesly retorted. "Well, that is the first I ever heard of it."

"You lie! Did I not make you confess, five years ago, when I caught you in a very unpleasant situation, that you held me in absolute awe?"

"No! Flem Baxter—no! I never told you I was afraid of you, nor will I ever tell you so. Listen! ye ain't so keen as ye might be, or ye'd beh learned, long ago, that the murderer o' the gal ye found me kneelin' over, has since died, over in Sing Sing, and confessed his crime o' killin' her, along wi' several other deeds. So you see your little game is baffled thar."

Baxter scowled, and uttered a fierce oath.

"You are lying to me," he growled, savagely.

"No, I ain't—not fer a cent," Uncle Blakesly declared. "When ye go up ter Sing Sing fer a stay ye can find out all about it from the keeper."

"When I go to Sing Sing it will be after you're dead," Baxter gritted. "Don't think I'm layed, old friend, because I am not. You know I always was famous in getting the best of a bargain, and since we are to be enemies, I shall try to make you as uncomfortable as I can, seeing

that we are, or were, once slightly related. Ta! ta! now. I'll drop up to Hudsonale as soon as I have time."

"You'd better not, Flem, fer you'll find it ain't a werry hospital place fer you when I am to home. Ef ye show your mug thar, I'll punch it for ye as true as I'm one o' ther old stock they uster breed up in Schoharie."

"Presumably I shall not come until I shall have gained some hold upon you whereby I can make you my loving friend. Ha! ha! always capture your bear first and break him in afterward."

And then the dark man laughed triumphantly, and walked away, leaving Uncle Blakesly in rather a warm-tempered mood.

"Drat that man!" he muttered. "He has ever been an evil shadder in my path, and seems determined to crush me. But, just let him show his head at Hudsonale, an' I'll smash it!"

CHAPTER III.

NEW YORK NELL SHOWS HER HAND.

"Fire!" "Fire!" "Fire!"

Shouts and lusty yells announced the cause of the mass of humanity that surged through the streets, of the rumble of heavy trucks, of the clang of pealing bells, and shrieks of whistles.

In the darkest hour before the dawn had the Babel of excited sound burst upon the night, and although the streets had been temporarily deserted but a moment before, it seemed scarcely an instant later that they were filled to overflowing with excited beings, who rushed pell-mell toward the North River, in which direction the sky was flushing ruddy with the reflection of a great fire.

It proved a useless task for the police to check the excited multitude, as there seemed a hundred fire seekers to every officer—consequently the rush was as of a mighty army, bent on storming some offending citadel.

The fire proved to be upon the river.

A large, full-rigged vessel of Southern "hail" was riding at anchor but a short distance out in the river, wrapped in a brilliant sheet of flame, about the hull and deck, while the masts towered like gaunt specters into the night, as yet unscathed by the flames.

Other vessels in the vicinity were being towed away, and everywhere was a scene of bustle and excitement.

The fire patrol guarded the river front and kept back the crowd with their clubs, but it was only by hard work that they succeeded.

And they did not even do that, for one figure eluded them and ran toward the water with the agility of a fawn.

It was no use, however, for the patrol sprung in pursuit, and soon succeeded in capturing the offender.

"See here, you young devil, what do you mean by breaking past the law?" one of the officers cried, shaking the person roughly. "See here, boys—shall we bundle him off to the 'jug?'"

"Better try it if you know when your pants don't fit you," the offender replied, saucily. "Just you drop your grip, cully, or I'll report you to headquarters."

"What d'ye mean? Who the devil aire you, you sassy—"

"Shut up. Don't go to callin' me names or I'll thump you. I'm Nell Niblo, of the N. Y. D. F., ef you want to know it, and the sooner you let go of me, the better it will be for you."

The officer released his hold instantly, his manner changing from surly to courteous.

"Excuse me," he said, "I did not recognize you. Where are you going?"

"To release the victim of a trap," the girl replied.

Then she darted on, and leaped from the pier into an empty row-boat that was rocking at the water's edge.

The next instant she was seen pulling toward the burning vessel.

The people who could see her watched with eagerness.

What she was going to do was more than they could determine.

On, on, she went as fast as she could row, toward the burning boat, herself and the frail craft she so skillfully managed, the center of many wondering glances.

Nearer—nearer to the boat she pulled, strongly and steadily.

Once or twice she was hailed and warned that the masts were liable to pitch into the water at any minute, but her only answer was a wild, reckless laugh.

She pulled directly beneath the prow of the vessel, and shipped her oars, then, without a word, leaped into the river and disappeared from sight.

In two seconds she reappeared, and catching hold of the prow rigging, went up, hand over hand, with the agility of a monkey.

A moment later she clambered aboard where the flames had not yet reached, and swung her hat triumphantly, to a thunder of applauding shouts that seemed to come from sea and shore.

The next instant she turned and plunged from view directly into the flame.

The horrified cry went up from the watchers in the boats, upon the river, and the many excited gazers upon the docks.

Was the boy-girl insane? Certain death lurked everywhere within the seething sea of flame that enveloped the greater portion of the vessel, and was now licking the rigging spitefully, making brighter the lurid night.

The boats upon the river, of which there now were scores of all kinds, pulled nearer to the doomed ship, as if awaiting to receive the venturesome creature who had gone into the jaws of death for—what?

This was the question uppermost in the minds and the mouths of the eager, excited watchers.

The vessel was a whaler, just ready for sea again.

What could attract the venturesome daredevil aboard such a craft, in the face of the merciless flames, remained a mystery.

But not long.

Soon she burst again from the flame, upon the unscathed portion of the boat, and bore in her arms a form draped in female attire.

A moment she paused, and gazed at the boats upon the water nearest the vessel, then leaped overboard into the firelit water of the river.

Instantly two boats nearest the vessel pulled swiftly toward the spot where she had gone down.

One boat contained Colonel Fleming Baxter and two low-browed ruffianly-looking fellows; the other contained two young men of some four and twenty years of age, respectively, one of whom was decidedly western in appearance, with his slouch hat, long hair, and tanned buck-skin hunting shirt.

It became at once apparent that each boat was determined to reach the spot of rescue before the other, and a single moment proved that the boat containing the long-haired chap and his companion was destined to be victorious, for the little craft seemed to fairly skim over the top of the water, so fast it went.

Colonel Baxter urged his men fiercely, a torrent of oaths escaping his lips as he saw that he was not to be the rescuer of the brave girl detective and her companion.

"Stop! stop!" he yelled, fiercely. "Those are mine to rescue—mine to protect! Hands off, I command you."

"You go to—Mexico!" the man with the long hair shouted, just as Nell Niblo came to the surface, bearing her fainting or unconscious companion, and both were hauled quickly into the boat.

"You see I have got them, my savage friend," the long-haired man continued, turning and mockingly addressing Baxter, "and, what's more, I intend to keep them for a bit. So just whistle a solo, for your pains, and go home."

The next minute the boat shot toward the piers rapidly gliding through the choppy waters.

With smothered curses of rage Baxter ordered his companions to pull ashore, which they did, landing at a pier further up the river.

"My young lad, you are a hero!" the long-haired young man of the rescuing boat said, turning to New York Nell, who was seated in the stern with her charge lying across her lap. "How did you know the lady was in the ship, boy?"

"In the first place, you're sucked in about my being a boy; and in the next place, it's my own private biz how I found out about the lady's bein' in the boat," Nell replied independently. "If you want to exchange cogs, my name is Nell Niblo, alias, New York Nell, news girl, spotter, detective and hard crowd generally. Now, what's your appellative?"

"My name is Jack Carson, and I'm from up Leadville country," the long-haired man responded, tipping his hat. "My companion, here, calls himself Val Vernon, I believe. We met below here just as the fire broke out, and became acquainted to the extent of jumping into a boat and pulling for the blaze."

"Correct! He's Val Vernon, all right, no doubt; but I twig you alleee samee, as the Chinamen say. "You ain't Carson no more'n I'm John Jacob Astor or Tony Pastor. But it's all right. It will keep with me."

"Well! if you ain't the queerest gal in boy's clothing I ever met, I'll be shot!" the Westerner exclaimed in surprise. "Of course my name is Carson. Do you suppose I am some criminal, sculling around under an alias?"

"You are liable to be made 'most anything to suit the fancy of a pair of scheming villains, if you don't look out for yourself mighty sharp," Nell replied. "Hold on! don't pull ashore where all the crowd is, or the perlice will be nosing into what is none of their business. Pull down-stream till I tell you to stop."

The order was promptly obeyed, and the boat headed down the stream.

After ten minutes' ride, Nell gave the order to go ashore, and they pulled into an empty dock and tied up.

The long-haired man took the girlish form of the rescued woman in his arms and sprung ashore, and Vernon assisted Nell to disembark, following her example himself.

"Where do you want this lady taken, young lady?" Carson asked, pausing and gazing into Nell's face with a long, searching scrutiny, as if he were trying to read her purpose.

"Well, if you want the job of carryin' her, come along and I'll show you," she replied, flushing, and turning away. "I'm going to take her where she will be cared for, and don't you forget it. So come along."

She led the way up the dark, narrow thoroughfare which led from the river into the dense city. Carson followed his strange conductress, bearing the insensible lady, whose face was heavily veiled, and Val Vernon brought up the rear.

In the course of fifteen minutes, they arrived before the door, or rather opening, of a staircase which ascended into a tumble-down, grimy-looking tenement building, which evidently had been one erected a half-century before.

Up the rickety staircase the news girl led the way to a hallway in the third story.

Here she paused, and gave a loud rap upon the door, and a few minutes later it was opened by a toothless, ugly-looking old hag, whose tattered dress and disheveled hair served to make her appearance akin to frightful.

"Well, what d'ye want, gal?" she demanded, surveying the news girl sharply. "Who's them fellers, an' what's wantin'?"

"If you'll hold your tongue a minnit, and let us in, you'll be apt to find out the quickest," Nell replied, fearlessly. "Scat! now!"

The old woman growled something unintelligible about being disturbed, and threw the door open, admitting her visitors into—not a dirty, filthy hovel, as Carson and Vernon had expected, but a richly furnished parlor of considerable size, with frescoed walls and ceilings, rich plush carpeting, stuffed furniture of elegant pattern and finish, luxurious sofas, a Steinway grand piano—in fact, many and many attractive and costly adornments that would not have disgraced a palace on Fifth avenue.

Carson was not sorry, either, when he received directions to deposit his burden upon one of the sofas, for her weight was beginning to tell upon him.

"Well! well!" the old hag grunted, setting her hands upon her hips, with her arms akimbo. "Now, what's up, you, Nell Niblo? Who aire these two fine-lookin' fellows, and who is the woman yonder with the veiled face?"

"The lady is my charge," New York Nell announced. "I rescued her from the burning

ship, and I'm goin' to assume charge of her for a spell. You must keep her here, and treat her like a lady, and see that no one gets a glimpse of her. Do you hear?—nobody, except yourself and I."

"I hear," the old woman assented, with an odd smile. "No one ever come a-visitin' to Mag Mink yet when she sed they couldn't, and them as tried allus went away with sore heads."

"Yes, you're a good watch-dog, Mag, and have done me many a good turn," the news girl said. "These young gentlemen are Mr. Carson, and Mr. Vernon, who kindly volunteered to help me ashore with my charge. The long-haired feller is Kitopher Carson—t'other'un is Vernon. Come, boys, let's take leave now. Mag, she'll take keer of the lady, and you can get back to your hotels, carryin' with you the thanks of New York Nell for your services."

Thus dismissed, Carson and Vernon bowed themselves out, and Nell followed them to the street.

"I'll show you the way out of this place," she said, taking the lead. "Heaven only knows, there are traps enough to catch the uninitiated."

In ten minutes she had guided them out of the narrow place into one of the well-lit, principal thoroughfares.

"There! you are now where you can go it alone. Better get to your roosts, too, for late 'uns are allus spicioned by the police. Whar'll I find you ter-morrer, Kitopher Carson?"

"At the Union Place Hotel, miss."

"All right. Just you lay low there, until I drop in to see you. S'pect I know somethin' more about you than you do yourself. And, above all, avoid familiarizin' with strangers."

Then, turning abruptly, she hurried away in an opposite direction.

She at once sought her lodgings, in a tenement building in Baxter street—a single apartment in the fourth story, furnished neatly with a rag carpet, a stand containing a lamp and a few papers, a white counterpaned little bed, and a single chair. It was not much, but was all she could afford, after purchasing her meals, and still was a home to her, which she often sought as a welcome refuge, after the toils and turmoil of busy metropolitan days.

Early the following morning, even before the day was light, she was abroad, with a large budget of morning papers, which she disposed of upon her delivery route, after which she was again equipped with another armful, to sell upon the street.

Newsboys has New York without limit, but none of them stood a ghost of a chance in the business with pretty Nell Niblo, who invariably sold her papers as fast as she could hand them out, and make change.

The Bowery was her bonanza ground. Every one knew her, and admired her, and it was no trick for her to sell a hundred papers from sunrise till seven, in summer time.

The same success greeted her on lower Broadway, and everywhere she went, many of the "mashable" young men purchasing in the hopes of being rewarded by a smile, which they always got, if gentlemanly and respectful.

The policemen knew her along the whole force, and although it lay in their power to arrest her for masquerading in attire not natural with her sex, they seldom offered her molestation, for she was ever modest, well behaved, and just independent enough to "to hoe her own row," and defend herself from insult, and no one of an honest and honorable turn of mind ever let drop a word or hint that New York Nell the news girl was not in every way respectable.

To-day, of which we narrate, her trade was good, and by noon she had disposed of over two hundred and fifty papers, on which she realized about one dollar and fifty cents profit, so small is the margin on the dailies.

It was now that her thoughts reverted to her promised call upon Carson, and she accordingly went to a deserted corner to sit upon a step, and count the contents of her pockets.

The result was twenty-two dollars—all her own, which it had cost her two whole weeks to accumulate. Out of this had to come six dollars for rent, leaving her sixteen dollars.

"Jest enough to rig up in style fer one't," she murmured, eying the money. "An' I'm goin' fer new togs, if I don't never make another cent. Et's good enough to go ragged a-sellin' papers, but when one's goin' to call on sech fellers as that ar' Carson, good togs stand pre-eminent. Mebbe, too, he's on the romantic lay, an' I can "mash" him. Ha! ha! fancy me a heroine of a love scrape! Bet I'd get laughed at. S'pose I orter put on gal togs, but I ain't goin' to, no-sir-ee! It's just eight years ago since Mam Niblo put boy's togs on me an' lent me the front end of her garter, with the motherly injunction to go sellin' news for a livin', an' so I've hung to my costume faithfully, an' it's too late now to try an' play on sumthin' I wasn't brought up to. Bet I'd trip in skirts first shot."

It had been a long time since she had been extravagant enough to invest in new wearing apparel, and she now was resolved to break the monotony of her appearance, for once, at least.

To think, with her, was to act, and a visit to different furnishing stores soon put her in possession of what she needed.

She then repaired to her Baxter street lodgings and arrayed herself the best she knew how.

When she again appeared upon the street, she was a picture, compared with her former original self.

She was attired in a suit of nobby light-brown cloth, with neatly-polished shoes upon her feet, and a jaunty straw hat upon her sunny, curly head. Her shirt front, ornamented with collar and tie, boasted of a large paste diamond pin, while rings of the same material graced her fingers and she twirled a natty little walking stick.

As a boy she was a "masher," while in her femininity of graceful figure and roguish face, she "caught 'em all," judging by the admiring glances she attracted, as she sauntered over into the Bowery, and thence wended her way toward the Union Place Hotel.

"Oh, my! what a figger I cut!" she laughed to herself, as she saw her shadow in the show windows, "S'pose half of my old acquaints won't know me. If I only could get along with-

out sellin' papers, I'd just like to play sport all the time, so I would! But, now, I must call on that Jack Carson and see if he knows anything about danger in under them long hairs of his'n."

CHAPTER IV.

JACK BLAKESLY HEARS OF A RIVAL.

MR. JACK CARSON had just gone out for a stroll, when she inquired for him at the Union Place Hotel. Would be in a-timo for two o'clock luncheon, said the polite clerk, who failed to recognize in the nobby inquirer the rollicking news girl who came regularly to tease him to invest in a paper, which he never found time to do because she "chaffed" him, poked fun at the few sallow hairs upon his upper lip, and advised him to go out West and buy a complexion.

So Nell lounged about the waiting-room, smoked a cigarette to be fashionable, and waited for the long-haired son of Colorado to put in an appearance.

While she was waiting, she heard a familiar voice, and saw the dressy Colonel Baxter enter, accompanied by two companions, also well attired but evil-looking as any pair of knaves one could find photographed in the Rogues' Gallery.

The colonel spied our heroine about the same moment she spied him, and, dismissing his companions, he approached her, with a dark scowl.

"Aha! so it's you, is it?" he saluted, taking a chair near by. "I've been searching all over the city for you. Where is the woman you rescued from the burning boat last night?"

"Where she'll keep," was the cool reply.

"Take care, my pert miss—for I've found out that you are a girl instead of a boy, and if you know when you're well off you'll use more courtesy in addressing."

"Will I, thought? S'poso I do as I please—how are you going to help yourself?"

"I'll show you mighty quick, my gal. I want you to tell me what you did with the woman you rescued."

"Then I'll plainly tell you it's none of your business. I've put her where she will be in good care, and out of your villainous clutches."

"But, you fool, that woman was my wife. What business have you to shut her up, where I cannot find her?"

"Your wife, eh?"

"Of course she is!"

"What was she doing aboard the burning boat, then?"

"Easily answered. The ship was to sail today, and I took her aboard to be ready, and was on my way to join her when I discovered her!"

"Phew!" and Nell Niblo took off her hat to give her curly head a dig. "That's too shaky a yarn to swaller, old man—too transparent. What was the lady doin' chucked away in the hold, bound hand and foot, if what you say is true?"

"She wasn't!"

"She was!"

"You lie, curse you!"

"You lie back again, curse you!"

"You impudent hussy, I'll strike you, if you contradict me."

"No, you won't, Baxter. Just close your

valve and listen. Your little game is all known to me, or most of it, at least, and the whole will eventually come into my possession. And while the opportunity is offered me, I want to tell you that if you hope to keep yourself out of Sing Sing, the best thing for you to do is to get right up and climb out of the city—go West. I ain't fooling you, neither. The sooner you are fifteen hundred miles from New York the less liability there is of your being hanged. Do you know what I am?"

"An accursed idiot!" the colonel growled, not yet determined whether the eccentric creature was to be feared or not.

"No, not an accursed idiot," Nell replied, proudly. "God gave me the usual gifts of humanity, and I have sharpened the same up by experience, until I am just ordinarily smart. Professionally, heretofore, I have been a detective and a news girl, the latter serving me in the former capacity. Professionally, henceforth, I am a detective. I tell you this because I would rather battle with an armed villain than one unarmed. The victory is greater, the satisfaction keener. Look at me. I am a mere critter of a girl—seventeen years of age only—and never had the advantage of a common school education. Still, there is a heap of sense and understanding in my curly head, and I have eyes like a hawk. The detective business suits me, as I always happen around just out of sight but in hearing, in time to hear important disclosures. I was in Philadelphia a week ago, and heard a few things which I put on file, and shall use them when the proper time arrives."

Baxter scowled fiercely.

"You evidently know nothing against me," he said. "But in case you do, I'll take good care you don't do any one any particular harm!"

"Ha! ha! I am glad you take it so lightly. Open enmity is ten times easier to conquer than hang-dog sneakism. And about this rescue business; I strolled into a down-town saloon last night, where a lot of sailors were carousing on the strength of a ten-dollar note which one of them had received. Any idea whom he got it from?"

"Not the least," Baxter replied, without flinching.

"But I have. The sailor said as how he had got it from a black-lookin' chap, who had brought a lady aboard, and wanted her stowed away in the hold and taken out to sea on the Lady Julia, which sailed on the morrow. He didn't want her harmed—only kept aboard during the out trip, and if she should be accidentally left upon some desolate island, it would not have been a matter of much consequence, and it would be a matter of five hundred dollars deposited in the bank at the sailor's disposal on his return. I heard this much, and waltzed down to the rescue. I saw your anxiety and concern, and rightly knew where to place you, after seeing you in the Quaker City. That's what about the lady. I rescued her, and have stowed her away until I get time to hear her case. Then I shall find what's the secret between you. I've a suspicion about the matter, tucked away, and maybe it ain't far out of the way. As for your Blakesly scheme, you take care! That's all."

In his rapidly rising rage, Baxter's face assumed a grayish pallor.

Here were all his plots in the knowledge of a mere child—but a remarkably shrewd, keen child, as he was forced to admit himself.

"Curse you. I'll fix you," he said, with a malicious gleam in his eyes. "I've tamed canary birds for a living, and not lost my art yet."

"Yes, but you never tamed a little New York bantam rooster—a regular little game-cock!" Nell retorted, as he arose and stalked out of the room, muttering baleful oaths.

"Bet a clam he feels as if he'd like to shut off my wind," the girl muttered; "Mebbe I hadn't orter let him know'd I knew so much, but I couldn't resist the temptation. But, nevertheless, I'm goin' ter get the fat of the game. Wonder just how I'm going to commence, anyhow? The first thing is evidently to see our long-haired Western coon."

It was the middle of the afternoon ere Carson put in an appearance, and came forward to be seated, and shake hands.

"Sorry I kept you waiting," he said, twisting his handsome mustache, "but I got interested in a little game of faro, upon Broadway, and could not tear myself away, until I cleaned out the bank. But now I am at your service."

"What's become of your companion?"

"Vernon? Oh! he's up at Police Headquarters, instituting inquiries for a lost sister, who eloped with a precious rascal who was, at the time, her music-teacher. Vernon has been searching for them, far and wide, with a vengeful vow to plant the afore-said music-teacher, when he finds him."

"Has his sister money?"

"Yes. She and her brother each came into possession of a large cash fortune, recently I believe."

"Then, I've twigged the game, already. The music-teacher has coaxed her off with him simply to get hold of filthy lucre."

"Ahl have you seen her, then?"

"Mebbe—mebbe not. Spect I might lay a paw on her, possibly, if I was hit with a big inclination."

"Well, this is good news, and Vernon will pay you well to tell him."

"Perfeshional detectives ain't a-goin' ter shuck off p'ints, even fer money, sometimes, I trow. But, laying aside that matter, I want to inquire what business brought you to New York?"

"Oh! I came East on a visit to some of my relatives," the Westerner confessed. "You see, I've been gone some eight years, and got kind o' hungry to gaze upon old friends."

"And your name is Jack Blakesly?"

"Well, yes, though up in the West I was called Jack Carson, because it was easier on the tongue. But, how did you know?"

"Oh! I've a peculiar faculty of gaining points. Was in Philadelphia, when old Uncle Redmond Blakesly arrived there to receive and welcome you back!"

"What! are you crazy, girl? I have not yet had a glimpse of the old man. Indeed, I have been rather doubtful about seeing him, since he lent me the toe of his boot to start me on my own hook, over eight years ago."

"Ha! ha! that's the same story the other fellow told."

"What other fellow?"

"Why, the returned prodigal, Jack Blakesly, to be sure."

"Pshaw! you speak in riddles. What do you mean?"

"Well, I'll tell you, just for greens. Jack Blakesly, of Leadville, Col., arrived in Philadelphia, last week, and was met by his father. Since that they have gone up to Hudsondale, the old farmer's country seat, to spend the heated term—the old man, the young man, and the pretty orphan."

The real Jack Blakesly gave vent to a whistle of surprise.

"So, another Jack Blakesly has got in ahead of me, eh?" he said, reflectively. "Well this is romantic—and not so very strange, either, for I'm told the old gent is worth a cool half a million. What for looking fellow is the other Jack?"

"Rather white-livered—like a hot-house plant w'ot ain't been watered lately."

"Humph! And he calls himself Jack Blakesly, eh?"

"On course he does."

"But, does the old gent take him in all right?"

"Reckon so. Leastways, he took 'em down to Hudsondale."

"You intimate that there is a third party?"

"Yes, an orphan when Jack has under his charge until she can learn the whereabouts of a rich brother who lives in the East."

"Ah! then judging by what you say, there is not much of a show for me. If the other feller's Jack Blakesly, who the deuce am I?"

"You're N. G., in that respect. You're left out. If you are the *bona fide* Jack Blakesly, you maybe have something, in the way of proof, that will establish your identity."

"I am sorry to say that I haven't, to my knowledge. I didn't expect I should have a rival, or I should hardly have taken the pains to come East, for quarreling is not one of my accomplishments. Still I opine I shall have to interview this rival of mine."

"Bully for you! Don't give up such a little game, when there's a show for winning. If you want help and want to pay for it, I'm ready for biz—Navy York Nell, at your service, perfeshional defective, an' ef I can't win a case I take hold of, I don't charge a cent."

"As you say, I shall not give up the little game, I care nothing for what little property may be at risk, as I am pretty well heeled, but, I don't propose to let any usurper occupy a position that is rightfully mine. And I shall be only too glad to enlist you in my service, for you appear to have all the qualities of a thorough detective. You can do the planning and light work, and leave the fighting, if any, to me. As for the pay, you may command your own terms, as I've got a gold-mine and a bank at my order. Perhaps you will want some money down? If so, here is a hundred dollars."

"Which I will accept only to purchase such things as will aid me in my labors for you," Nell said. "Now I will leave you, to allow you to think the thing over, and form an idea how it is best to go to work. But, look out for one Colonel Baxter, and a couple of villainous companions he has. He is the backer, I take it, of

the usurper, and if he finds out who you are, will probably attempt to do you harm. Therefore, it is well enough to keep on your guard."

"I know this Baxter by repute," Jack Blakesly replied coolly. "He comes from up in the mines, also, and this is not his maiden attempt at villainy. I'll take care of myself, as far as he is concerned. I once had the pleasure of knocking him down for insulting a girl; perhaps I shall have occasion to repeat the operation."

New York Nell, after leaving the original Jack Blakesly, resorted at once to a well-known costumer and invested a part of her money in wigs, costumes and effects to match.

All of these she ordered sent to her lodgings, after which she strolled in the Bowery in quest of some one. This one she found in the person of a dirty young bootblack of some fifteen years—a stout fellow, with a face like a prize-fighter, and a pair of fists to match, while in his eyes there was a bold, yet drowsy expression, the meaning of which one was liable to mistake.

He was seated upon a barrel in front of a grogillery, engaged in puffing away at a pipe, while he swore alternately with his pulls at a gang of smaller boys who were throwing peas at him, which they had purloined from a neighboring grocer's basket.

He eyed New York Nell in surprise as she approached.

"Hello! been a fire, Nibs? You're fixed up like a dandy!"

"So I am, to be sure," the young detective replied gayly. "Who's got a better right?"

"Dunno 'bout that. Spect you've been capturin' a bonanza, ain't ye? Gracious, but you're fly!"

"Yes, and you might be, if you had any ambition. Why don't you brace up and have some style about you?"

"How in thunder's a seller goin' to brace up on a business of ten cents a day?" the boy demanded, sourly. "Hain't got but two cash shines to-day, an' both o' them was counterfeit nickels. All the rest on tick."

"When you ketch old Niblo doin' biz on tick, or gettin' roped in on bogue, you sing the Dead March of Sal, will you? Know what I'm going to do with you, Sam Snicker?"

"No!" the boy replied, not manifesting much interest.

"Well, I'll tell you; I'm goin' to take you to work fer me, on a salary of twenty-five cents a day. Will you accept?"

"What's to do?"

"Shadow—dodge, sneak—eavesdrop—in fact, do a general detective business."

"Phew! d'ye s'pose I'll do, Nibs?"

"Of course you'll do! I'll give you instructions, an' when you comb your head once with a sharp-toothed comb, I'm sure you'll find wits enough to keep you afloat. If you don't, I'll stir you up with the toe of my shoe."

"All right. I'll do it!"

"Then come along to my brown-stone front, and I'll give you your cue to work on."

The bootblack accordingly left his perch on the barrel, and followed the girl detective to her lodgings in Baxter street, where she took

him into her confidence, and posted him as to his duties.

She was in no wise afraid to trust him, for she had known him for years, and always found him trustworthy and honest, and a fellow with a bulldog determination.

CHAPTER V.

AT HUDSONDALE.

UPON the right-hand shore of the majestic Hudson in going up the river, was situated the magnificent estate of Hudsondale, of which Uncle Blakesly was the owner. It had a frontage along the water's edge of about one hundred rods, and from the water rolled back and upward in a beautiful slope, to a sort of bench or tableland, whereon was erected a fine modern mansion, surrounded by spacious verandas, vine-draped arbors, and in the rear a magnificent garden, and carriage drives, and out-buildings.

The great lawn in front was divided by a broad flagstone walk which led to the water's edge, down over the numerous terraces, the last division, looking toward the water, being a dense park of gigantic maples, beneath whose outstretching branches lurked spraying fountains, croquet plateaus, swings and arbors, to say nothing of a pretty little observatory that towered above the highest tree-tops, and commanded a view of the Hudson for miles in either direction, and of other beautiful homes across the water.

The land containing the park sloped gradually from the mansion, half the distance to the river—then, by a sudden freak of nature rolled upward toward the water, terminating in a great wooded cliff, which broke off perpendicularly at the water's edge. This wooded tract contained in all several acres, making a most lovely and picturesque feature of the grounds.

On the opposite of the avenue there rose from the river to the mansion terrace after terrace of beds of flowers and plants and flowering bushes. Not a small assortment, but every known American variety, and many foreign shrubs, plants and bushes remarkable for their beautiful blossoms, perfume and foliage.

It was now the time of the year when all of nature's adornments were wreathed in smiles, and the view of the grounds was most enchantingly beautiful.

At the foot of the lawn, a steam-and-sail yacht of diminutive size and graceful build rocked on the water at anchor ready for use.

And it was to such a home that Uncle Redmond Blakesly had brought the pseudo Jack and Miss Vernon and installed them.

"Thar!" he said, after he had gone through the preliminaries of introducing them to Miss Prudence, a prim old maid of five-and-fifty, with a keen gray eye and a sour temper—"thar they ar". Prudence—my boy Jack and his lady friend, Miss Vernon, who has come East arter her brother. An', d'ye mind, Prudence, they're to take their ease an' hav what pleasure the sittywation offers 'em; an' I'll bet a chaw of Navy that Hudsondale beats any home they ever had before. Take care of 'em, Prudence. Thar'll be an extra servant gal up on the evenin' boat ter help Sally. An' now I'm off fer a good nap,

ar'er which ther old man will be as lively as a flea."

And so Jack and Viola were left to entertain themselves in the great mansion, with its complement of many magnificently-decorated rooms furnished with everything that the taste of a connoisseur could conceive.

For in Miss Prudence there was not much entertainment, as she seldom spoke except it was to sputter, find fault and scold.

After making toiletts in their respective rooms, the young people joined in the parlor and took a stroll down into the park, where there was relief from the heat of the day in the cool shade.

"Well, how do you like it now?" Jack demanded, triumphantly. "Is this not all and more than I boasted of—a grand home, such as any person might be proud of?"

"It is all very beautiful—too beautiful to seem true. But, Jack, is it yours—will it be yours? I have strange fears sometimes, after all your assurance."

"Bosh! You are silly. What further assurance can you ask, after I have been openly assured a welcome by my father?"

"I don't know, but—but maybe it is all right. It is a strange romance, anyhow, Jack. First, you were my music-teacher, and asked me to marry you. I hesitated, not because I did not like you, but because I deemed you a penniless wanderer. But one day you told me a strange story of having a grand home here, from which you had been alienated for many years, and could not return because you had not money to establish a recognition. You besought me to loan you a part of my fortune to help you regain your position, promising to wed and make me your wife.

"Dazzled by your description, I was tempted, and finally consented, and eloped with you from my home and my poor loving brother, who even now may be blindly searching for me. You have brought me here, Jack, and I have found all apparently as you held forth. But there is still one thing puzzles me: What became of the sum of three thousand dollars I have from time to time loaned you out of my fortune?"

Jack was silent for a few moments, his features working nervously, and his eyes gleaming strangely.

"Well, I will tell you. Yerrs ago I stole a diamond-set gold locket, which for ages had been an heirloom in my father's family, and pawned it for drink. I was wild in those days, and ungovernable. For that theft my father kicked me from his house, and told me I never thereafter could be his son and heir until I returned the locket to him. The tavern-keeper had cleared out for parts unknown, and nothing was left for me but to go out into the world and search for it. For eight years I spent my earnings in putting detectives on the trail. But to no purpose. No trace of it could I find, until one day, while yet your music-teacher, I read a description of a curious locket possessed by an Indian in Colorado. I got possession of some of your means, as you know, and set a detective on the track once more. The Indian was found, and had just sold the locket to a French trader, en route for Europe.

"Resolved not to give up hope, I dispatched the detective to Europe, in pursuit, and just before we started for the East, I received a telegram that the locket had been found. I wrote my father, and explained, and asked if I could come home, on the strength of it. He telegraphed on in the affirmative, and we came on. I left my matters in charge of my old friend, Colonel Baxter, and he met me in Philadelphia and told me that he had received a telegram from Morgan, my detective, to the effect that the Frenchman was in possession of the locket, but would not part with it, short of five thousand dollars."

Miss Vernon put up her hands, with a horrified little gasp.

"The outrageous monster. He ought to be gibbeted. So you cannot obtain your rightful position? Oh! Jack! you were very cruel ever to entrap me and my means, this way. I shall never forgive you!"

And she dropped into one of the rustic settees they were about passing, and burst into a passion of tears.

Jack bent over her with apparent tenderness.

"Tut! tut! don't cry, Viola," he said. "I have not yet despaired, and while I have hope you ought to have. Perhaps when I explain matters, father will relent, and give me the money to redeem the accursed heirloom."

"Oh! then let me go to him. I am sure I could prevail on him, if any one could. I will go at once!"

"Stay!" Jack said, hoarsely, pushing her back into the seat, his face suddenly growing deathly pale.

"Not for the world would I have you to interfere with so much as a word, in this matter. You do not know my father. His opinion of women, viewed at a respectful distance, is grand. But he will not listen to advice or entreaties from one. If you were to let fall a word, to give him an idea that you were interested in my welfare, he would pronounce me a fool with a woman tied to my apron-strings, and my hopes of a place in his esteem would be lost forever. In this respect he is unreasonable—unmovable."

"How terrible. I took him for such a good, genial old soul."

"Because you knew him only as he is when everything goes smoothly. Even I dread to approach him with the plea for fear he will show me the door again as he did eight years ago. Viola, you have the amount, have you not?—only think of it; just five thousand to place us the eventual heirs to this grand estate, and a half-million bank account."

"Jack! can you ask this? It is all I have left in the world, out of the little fortune I had a week ago."

"No! I will not ask it. I will suffer myself to explain to father, and stand the consequences. If I win, I am lucky. If I fail, I must go out into the world a penniless man, and try and earn the sum."

"You shall not! I will yield, and you shall send for the locket. But, stop, Jack. Listen! If it should ever come out that you have been swindling me, God have mercy upon you, for vengeance shall be mine, and mercy for you!"

shall not know. Come. We will go to the mansion and you shall have the money."

That evening Jack Blakesly the impostor, took the boat for New York, with five thousand dollars in his pocket, promising to return from New York by the morning boat.

"Going to meet a couple of distinguished college professors, you see, who are about to sail for Europe, you see," he explained, to satisfy Uncle Blakesly's curiosity.

And the old man patted him on the shoulder good-naturedly, bidding him godspeed.

"Take keer o' yerself, boy, an' look ye don't git peeled. It's a great place for greenhorns to git roped in, I tell ye. Cum back when you git thr'u wi' your professors; an' in the mean time yer old dad will spark around ther gal, just fer to see if sparkin' seems as nice as it did fifty years ago. Ha! ha!"

And after the old servant had rowed Jack out a-stream, to meet the down boat for New York, the old farmer turned back toward the long veranda in front of the mansion, where Viola was standing, watching the departure with an eager, wistful, half-scared expression in her eyes.

"Sech a boy fer book-larnin', eddication, and refinement is that Jack," he said, his jolly old face beaming with pleasure. "At first he didn't seem like as ef he was my son, but, by golly, I like him the more I see him."

"Oh! I am so glad," Viola said. "I am sure we both love you dearly."

"Ob! then you an' Jack ar' a leetle thick, eh?" the old man queried, quizzingly. "'Spect you'll be hitchin' up in double harness one o' these days, eh?"

"Oh! no, sir. We have never thought of such a thing, even. Your son has always seemed to me more of a brother than a--a lover."

"Then, by thunder, I reckon I'll court ye up a little myself, when I get the time," Uncle Blakesly laughed, as he limped away.

Jack Blakesly, the bogus, went to New York, arriving there in the early twilight, and found Baxter in his room at the Union Place, engaged in getting outside of several varieties of wine and cigars.

The colonel was in none too pleasant a mood, but bowed graciously, and pushed forward an arm-chair with his foot.

"Sit down," he said, lighting a cigar. "Here are cigars and some good wine. Help yourself. What brings you here?"

"Money. I trumped up the locket story according to your plans, and succeeded in getting the last five thousand."

"Good. Give it to me. I know just where to put it to good advantage."

"So do I," the younger man said, throwing a roll of bills upon the table. "There is half of the amount. The other half I'll take the liberty of using as a lining for my own pockets."

"What! how do you mean? I am to have all the profits of the business the first year, for my services."

"Oh, no! You've got a wrong idea. I've played my part long enough for nothing, and either I have a big share of the spoils, or you can find another Jack Blakesly."

"Curse you! But never mind. If we get the Blakesly estate it will be a fat thing for our pockets. How does Miss Vernon feel about it?"

"I think she trusts implicitly in me, in hope that I will get the property and marry her."

"Humph! she'll rave if there should be a collapse. How goes it with the old man?"

"Outwardly all is serene. But, I trow, he is watching with the eyes of a hawk, for something to confirm his suspicion that I am not genuine. If nothing arises to further arouse this suspicion, all promises to work well. But there is one thing imperative."

"What is that?"

"The other Jack Blakesly must be put out of the way, before he has a chance to do any harm. Were the old man to hear a word that there was another person claiming the position, my chances would be knocked in the head."

"I am as well aware of that as you are, and have been finishing my third bottle of wine in endeavoring to arrange a satisfactory plan for his disposal. I think I have hit upon one."

"Good! Let's hear it."

"It is this. Blakesly, Jr., has been taking the girl detective into his confidence, and she, by some means unknown to me, has gained a pretty correct idea of our business. Of course, she has told him about our little games, and he will shortly go up to Hudsondale to investigate. I have arranged to anticipate him. To-morrow he will be waited on by Sharky, in disguise, who will represent himself as an *attache* of Hudsondale, bearing a letter to Blakesly. Sit closer to the table, and take ink and pen, and indite what I shall direct you on the sheet of paper lying there, for your nerve and hand are a blamed sight calmer than mine."

Jack took the required stand.

"Date the letter, and head it at Hudsondale," Baxter said, "slinging a broad style of chirography. Then write as follows:

"MY DEAR SON:—Through accident I learned of your presence in New York, and hasten to send you my trusty hand, to fetch you home in my little steamer. Do not fail to come, for there's a grave matter, here at Hudsondale, to be settled. Another young man has come to me, claiming to be my son. I wish to decide on one, and boot the other out. Don't fail to come, as I am confident you are my son, and the other an impostor."

"Your father,

"REDMOND BLAKESLY,

"Of Hudsondale."

"That will do," Baxter concluded. "Young Blakesly will be the recipient of the letter, to-morrow. He can have no doubts as to its originality, and will accompany Sharky. A little steamer, I have chartered, will convey them up the river, after dark, and my two tools—you know who—will surprise the heir in his cabin, and after binding and weighting him, will throw him into the river, so that we shall not have any more trouble from him."

"A capital plan," Jack agreed, with a sigh of relief—"that is, if it works."

"It will and must work. After that I have another plan, a hundred times more diabolical. But, I will not unfold it now. It is best to work only one trap at a time."

Jack returned to Hudsondale—that is, the

counterfeit Jack did. The genuine Jack remained at the Union Place, and waited for New York Nell to put in another appearance, whereat they could hold another consultation.

During the course of the day, he was approached by a seedy-looking individual, with red hair and stubby beard, who doffed his hat and bowed humbly:

"Sur, tha be afther tellin' me at tha office, there, fot you be tha lad by the name of Carson, sur," he said, in an unmistakable Irish brogue.

"I am Jack Carson, yes," was the long-haired Westerner's reply. "Who are you?"

"Sure, me name it is Andy, sur, an' I'm tha hired mon, up at Hudsonale, fot does the work. An' tha old boss, he was afther sendin' me down here to New Yorick, to tha Union Pallus Howtel to give a letter to a gintlemon by the name of Jack Carson, an' wait for an answer."

"Well, give me the letter, for I am undoubtely the man you seek."

Accordingly the Hibernian produced the letter, which was addressed to "Jack Carson Blakesly."

"I wonder what now?" were Jack's thoughts as he tore open the envelope. But, when he perused the inclosure, his countenance was the scene of many contending emotions.

"See here, you Limerick," he said, turning to the Irishman. "Did you get this from old Redmond Blakesly himself?"

"Faith, shure an' I did. Who would be afther givin' it to me but the boss?"

"I don't know. Maybe it is all right. How far is it to Hudsonale by water?"

"A bit of a ways, sur—twinty or tin miles, I guess."

"I dare say it is," Jack replied dryly. "Have you a conveyance?"

"A bit of a stameboat, sur, belonging to tha masther, fot I can manage like a daisy."

"Very well. Tell me what time you propose to return, and I will be on hand."

"The steamer lies at Pier No. —, Hudson River, yer honor, and will l'ave at eight this avenin'."

"Why do you pull out so late?"

"Because I have business to attend for tha masther."

"Very well. Go attend to it, and look for me at the time and place."

The Irishman bowed and took his leave, while Jack lit a fresh cigar and pondered.

"How I will bounce out the usurper when I get there! It will do me good, and secure me favor with my dad. He admires muscle as well as brains. I wonder why the girl-boy don't come around. It must be I've taken a fancy to her, for my thoughts wander to her most of the time."

But Nell did not put in an appearance, and night drew on, rapidly.

Arranging to have his baggage left at the hotel, Jack took a cab, and in due time was landed at the pier where awaited the Hudsonale boat.

Andy was just getting steam up, and yet found time to doff his hat, respectfully.

"Ah! the top of tha avenin to yez," he said. "If you'll be afther goin' into tha cabin, below

deck, you'll find a snug place, sure—an' I'll have stame up an' tha vessel movin' direct, sur."

"Thank you. I prefer to remain on deck and catch the breeze," Jack replied, and he accordingly seated himself by the lee rail, and lit a cigar for a quiet smoke.

Any suspicion of danger or unfair play had quite vanished from his mind, as there were only two persons besides himself, about the boat, being the Irishman, who was firing up, and a rough, black-whiskered looking fellow in the pilot box.

In due time the steam was up, and on, and the propellers began to vibrate, while the Sarah Jane, as the boat was named, glided out into the harbor, looking up-stream.

Jack enjoyed the departing view of the city, as they steamed away at a rapid rate, and settled himself comfortably into his seat for a snooze.

How long he snoozed he was not aware, for when he awoke, startled by some strange dream, the surroundings were enveloped in the mantle of night.

The boat was still moving swiftly through the water, up-stream, and the picturesque shores were only dimly visible, as they drifted by.

"Well, young man, I see you have had your nap," a voice said, near by, and Jack saw a man attired as a police officer, standing only a few paces away.

Impressed with a sense of impending danger, he now became thoroughly awakened, and discovered, for the first that his hands were locked in handcuffs.

"Yes, I am awake, and fail to understand why it is that my hands are in limbo," Jack replied, with flashing eyes.

"That is an easy question. I have a warrant from Albany, for the arrest of a fellow of your description, for horse theft," the policeman replied. "At least that is the story I should have told you, to have secured your arrest, had I not found you asleep. Now, all I have to say is that you have been trapped by tools paid by your enemies, and in the course of a few minutes, will journey off into a new world, where there is a law permitting immigration, but forbidding emigration."

"What! have I been tricked—duped?"

"Roped in, as sure as you are a sinner. My name is Fisk, and my companion's name is Shakry. We are, professionally, border russians, but are a little out of our sphere just now, because it pays. A party wanted your lease of life to expire, an' we tuk the job of furnishin' the desired effect, *sine die*."

"Villain! Release my wrists. You are fooling with the wrong man this time. Free me, or I will call for assistance and have a quick revenge on you."

"Bah! Call if you like, for only the waters will catch your vain appeal. The river is deserted, the shores at this point are too wide apart and too sparsely settled for you ever to make any one hear. Come, Shakry!"

The Irishman advanced, a triumphant grin distorting his features.

"Sure it was the devil's own trick I played on you so nicely," he said. "Troth, I am a

little ashamed of meself to take an advantage of sich a purthy young feller, but, sorry is the conscience fot won't be appeased by its weight in granebacks. Eh, Fisky?"

"Sart'in," the other replied. "Money is the root of all evil, an' the one who captures the root is decidedly the best feller."

"What do you intend doing?" Jack demanded, calmly. "You surely do not contemplate murdering me?"

"Oh, no! not exactly what one would call murder. You see, the world has long been in need of more sub-marine explorers who could bring about a revelation in regard to the bottoms of oceans, lakes and rivers, and I being rather a scientist, proposed to fill the want. That's all. Believing you might unreasonably object, I caused your hands and feet to be secured and your body weighted so as to keep you down long enough to do some good. When you have succeeded in making any discoveries worthy of mention all you'll have to do will be to get some mermaid to release you."

"You devil! If I could get free I'd break your skull with the first thing I could lay my hands upon."

"But you see you can't get free, so you may as well make the best of a bad situation. You have just five minutes to devote to piety before you pass in your checks, and so you may as well get down to business."

Jack did not reply.

He saw that anything he could say had no effect upon the ruffians into whose hands he had so easily fallen, and he resolved to give them no satisfaction over his weakness.

Sharky's companion took out his watch and stood where the light from the pilot-house reflected upon its dial.

"The five minutes is up!" he said, presently, closing the watch and restoring it to his pocket.

"Then, come along, an' let's get through with the job. Got any li'ker?"

Sharky assented, and produced a bottle, from which they both drank deeply. Then they approached Jack Blakesly and raised him in their arms, he powerless to help himself, and too brave to evince any horror he may have felt at his situation.

"Take him to the stern of the boat," Sharky said, and they did so.

Then bracing themselves, they swung the body to and fro between them, once, twice, three times and—

"STOP!" a sharp, stern voice cried, "or you are dead men!"

They did stop, and dropped Jack to the deck; then faced quickly around, with frightful oaths.

About a half-score of feet away, stood New York Nell, with a pair of cocked Smith & Wessons in her gripe, the muzzles of which were turned menacingly upon the would-be criminals a smile of triumph upon the girl's face.

"You are euchered!" she said, quietly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GAME BALKED.

The light from the reflector in the pilot-house shone down upon the tableau, giving it power and effect.

"The devil! who are you?" Sharky gasped,

turning pale and red at the same time. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that you just cheese it, where you are, or I'll bore a tunnel through your system quicker than an eyester ever slipped down a buckster's gullet. My handle is Nell Niblo—New York Nell, the g'hirl detective, fer short."

"Furies! how did you come here?"

"On the boat. Take care! don't try to pull no weapons, if you don't want to have your throttle forever closed. I'm just the gal to do the biz, if you don't obey orders. Yes, I cum up on the boat. Overheard a little conversation that led me to believe my perfeshional services might not come amiss, so I slyly stowed myself away in the hold. You, Sharky, just be kind enough to free Mr. Jack Blakesly of those little incumbrances he wears."

The ruffian hesitated.

"Go on!" Nell ordered, sharply; "just so sure as you refuse, I'll let daylight through you."

Sharky saw that his best and only hope was obedience, and he accordingly knelt beside Jack, and released his feet and hands so that he could rise.

"That's the kind," Nell said, approvingly. "I like to see rough cusses like you knuckle under, I do. Jack, while you give them each a good kick, apiece, I'll keep 'em covered."

"I have a better idea than that," Jack assured. "Make 'em jump into the river. If they've got grit and strength enough to swim ashore all right. If not, let 'em sink."

"But hadn't we better take 'em down to New York, and give them a trial for attempted murder?" Nell suggested.

"No. Let them go on the terms I have said. The next time they cross my track I'll shoot them on the spot, sure!"

"Then that settles it. Take a bounce, young men," the little detective said. "Start off at a regular go-as-you-please gait, six laps to the mile, and walk overboard."

"But, stop! stop! I cannot swim a stroke! I shall drown—I cannot swim a stroke," Sharky protested.

"But I can," his companion answered, "and since we've lost the game, I'm goin' to take the chance that's offered, you bet. So come along and I'll try and help you ashore."

The next minute the two men had jumped overboard, and then struck for the eastern shore, Sharky's companion, Fisk, floating upon his back, and causing Sharky to do so, also.

"Now, then, we'll pull for New York," Nell said, accepting Jack's proffered hand. "It was lucky I happened to overhear the plot between Baxter and your double, or your pie would have been fish-chowder. You'd 'a' been takin' submarine observations, as Sharky said."

"Undoubtedly so, my dear Miss Nellie, and I never can hope to find enough gratitude with which to pay you for your unselfish heroism, were I to live a hundred years. But gratitude failing, I have a little bank account to place at your disposal in the way of reward."

"Bah! get out! Money is something I rarely load my hands with. I guess I wasn't never intended for a banker—at least, I have never been much of a cashier. I'll take your gratitude, but not your money. Shall we go back to town?"

"Yes. I'll postpone my visit to Hudsondale a few hours at least. I think I'll go up and take a look at the situation later."

Nell went forward and examined the engine of the boat, and found everything in working order. She then stationed Jack there, with proper instructions how to keep the fires a-going, while she went to the pilot-box, and once more headed the boat for New York, which was made early in the morning.

Jack went at once to the Union Place Hotel for break'ast, inviting New York Nell to accompany him, but she declined, and sought her own home instead.

It chanced that Jack was assigned a seat at table opposite Colonel Fleming Baxter, whose scowling face manifested the surprise he felt at seeing the heir of Hudsondale alive and apparently in the best of health.

"You are quickly returned from your visit, I see, Mr. Carson," the landlord hailed from another table. "Didn't you find the folks at home?"

"Oh, yes, and well as usual. Such a welcome, too, would have brought tears to the eyes of an anchorite. But a telegram in the shape of a personal friend lured me again back to town for a few days."

In no word or way did Jack betray that anything had happened to him through the agency of Baxter's tools, which quite nonplused that party, and he masticated his food in savage silence.

As soon as the meal was over, he followed Blakesly into the lounging-room, where the long-haired Westerner had gone to smoke a cigar.

"Excuse me, sir," Baxter said, drawing a chair near, and seating himself. "It appears to me that I have somewhere encountered such a face as yours in my travels?" he said, inquiringly. "And yet I cannot recall the time and place."

"How very singular," Jack retorted, coolly. "Why, Flem Baxter, that game won't work at all. It wasn't six months ago that I had the pleasure of knocking you down, up in Leadville country, for insulting a lady on the street. Shouldn't be surprised if I indulged in an experiment of a similar nature again soon. I feel some that way."

"What, sir? Do you mean to intimate that you ever knocked me down—I, Colonel Baxter, gentleman?"

"Wal, yes," Jack replied, coolly. "Oh! you needn't play off, colonel, for it won't wash! I'm your enemy and you're mine. It's as broad as it is long, and I'll tell you right here that the first time I catch you out where policemen are not thicker than flies, I shall give you such a drubbing as you never had before. I've also got a job on hand, to go up and boot your pal out of my rightful position as heir at Hudsondale, too. I'm on the war-path now; so look out for music."

Baxter grated his teeth fiercely.

"We'll see about that," he growled. "You'll find I am more powerful than you think, at present. You had better go back West, while you have opportunity, or you will never get there. Listen! you seem to understand my game, and

there is no use of denying anything. I'll tell you frankly that I have set about to win the little game, and I'm going to do it, if it takes a century of time and perseverance, and a bank of money. Once I set about accomplishing a project, I never say die, until sufficient blood has been spilled to float my boat to a safe haven of refuge."

"I presume so. If I were you, I'd build a vault to store the hogsheads of gore in," Jack replied, sarcastically. "Of course you must know I am not afraid of you, Flem Baxter. From early youth I have grown up in a country where men of your type are regarded as harmless. I have dealt with more dangerous devils than two of you, and always come out victorious. It is no matter of doubt to me that you will fail in your project of beating me out of my right and title—I am certain of it, if success crowns all your efforts in the same way it did, last night."

"What do you mean? I am at a loss to understand you."

"What a pity! I simply referred to a little plot that hired me on a trip up the Hudson. Perhaps you are entirely ignorant concerning the matter?"

"In truth, I am. But, to talk business: Will you quit the field, or not?"

"Decidedly not," Jack replied, with great calmness. "That isn't the kind of a clothes-pin I am. In fact I rather enjoy a scrimmage and propose to see this thing through until you get a four by seven roost in Sing-Sing. That's my game, Flem, and you needn't go back on me."

"Then you shall die. Do you hear? You shall die, or be put at least, where you cannot interfere. If you will return West, keep mum, and leave the coast clear for us, I will keep harm from coming to you, and give you ten thousand dollars. Refuse, and you'll get the knife."

"Very well. I'll take the knife. Be sure and select a good one, however. A bad knife is more despicable than a low cur of a ruffian, like yourself," Jack said, rising to leave.

Baxter sprung to his feet, with an oath, raising his cane, threateningly.

"Chaw your words, you accursed whelp, or I'll break your head, for your insolence," he cried.

"Ha! ha! no! I never chaw anything but my victuals, colonel. Take care; hit if you think best."

The colonel did not think best evidently, for he made a pass at Blakesly's head, that must have felled him, had he not warded off the blow.

The next instant the miner's hard, knotty fist took the colonel in the region of the mouth, with stunning effect, and the recipient went back to the floor with a crash that made the floor tremble.

With a snarl of rage Baxter regained his feet, and again rushed at his opponent, this time to receive a blow that not only knocked him down, but caused him to remain there in an insensible condition.

While Jack sauntered coolly away into the bar-room, adjoining, whistling.

"I say, Cap, you'll find one of your guests lying on the floor in the next room," he said, indifferently. "He got a little too fresh—at-

tempted to assault me, you know—and so I pickled him. Please impress upon his mind, when you take him to his room, that I shall be in New York until to-morrow, and that if desirable to him, dueling pistols are on sale, a few blocks below."

Then the man from the West, sauntered away, as if nothing had happened, leaving the clerk staring in open-mouthed amazement.

Baxter was carried to his room, and restored to consciousness, and was given the message that had been left for him.

He swore fearfully, and sent for Barker, one of his pals, or, rather, one of his tools.

He was a dark fierce-looking ruffian, with a brigandish black mustache, and a look about his eyes that was not pleasant to study, it was so suggestive of ferocity.

Baxter at once explained how he had been handled by Blakesly, and was successful in making the narration emphatic by the use of many oaths.

"And now the young cuss has even had the cheek to challenge me!" he said, furiously.

"Waal, ye badn't orter growl at that," Barker said. "It gives ye a chance ter meet him, and git even."

"Fool! idiot! do you suppose I want to throw my life away? The fellow is a dead shot. Up in the Leadville country he has such a repute in that line that men fear him. No, sir, I'll not meet him. You must go in my place."

It was now Barker's turn to swear.

"You're cheeky," he growled. "As if I am a puppet to shield your carcass. I rather presume not, Mr. Baxter."

"Bah! you are as good a shot as he, and could win. Even if you didn't it wouldn't matter much. There's few would mourn your loss, I can tell you."

"As many for my side as yours. Besides I've no desire to pass in my checks yet."

"Well, then, let the whelp go, and I'll hire him silenced. I guess he eluded Sharky and the other 'un. See if there's any one listening outside."

Barker obeyed, but the hallway was deserted.

"The coast is clear," he reported. "Go ahead."

"All right. I'll tell you how I'm going to get the nippers on old Blakesly, so that he can't say his soul's his own. There's an old hag living in a tenement on Baxter street, by the name of Snicker. She used to be an old flame of mine, when she was young, but married a worthless coot, and is now an avaricious thing, none too scrupulous as to how she gets her cash, it having been hinted that men had been known to have died suddenly through her agency. Now I think a few dollars will hire her to do just what I want."

"And what is that?"

"I will tell you. Years ago, Redmond Blakesly drove his wife from his house because he suspected that she was unfaithful to him. From all I can learn, he has never heard a word from her since. Now I propose to send Suse Snicker to stir him up. She shall arrange for a meeting on the bluff by the river in the evening. She shall provoke and exasperate him, and I can easily foresee the result. He will attempt to

strike her, and she will back off the cliff into the Hudson, and disappear from view—until she can get ashore unobserved. About the same instant you and I will appear upon the scene, you being made up as a policeman, and we'll arrest the old man for murder! Ha! ha! what think you of the plot?"

"It is most diabolical, and yet promises to be successful, if you can arrange to your satisfaction with the old gal," replied Barker.

"Which I am certain I can do, by flattering the old fool. You see, after we catch Blakesly in the act, it will be all in my power to do as I will with him. The price of his life will be his obedience to my demands. I fancy that rather than go to the gallows, he will be as meek and tame as a lamb. If however, he is refractory, direct to the scaffold he goes and dances on nothing. After that I and Jack can carry things our own way."

Barker looked grim.

"Waal, I hope ye'll do suthin', purty lively, anyhow," he declared, "fer I'm gittin' hungry fer ther little scrip ye owe me, an' Fisk and Sharky ar' in about ther same fix. Bizness is bizness, and after ye git yer paws on Blakesly's money, either you've got to whack up our salary, or down goes your ten-pins."

"Of course. You shall have your money in full. Now, I must pay this Sue Snicker a visit, and see what I can do with her. You hang around here, and if you get a chance to hit Jack Blakesly hard and sure, without any one's seeing you, be sure and do it, so it will settle him."

Baxter soon after left the hotel, and made his way to Baxter street, in which thoroughfare Mrs. Susan Snicker was known to reside, in a single room in the top story of a dilapidated tenement. The house was a poor-looking affair, to say the least, but a fit representative of the general class of tenants who made it an abiding place.

Up the rickety stairs to the fourth story he went, and soon found the door of Mrs. Snicker's room, and knocked.

"Come in, ef ye've got bizness—if ye hain't, stay out," a shrill voice cried.

Baxter entered, and found himself in an apartment smelling strongly of tobacco and whisky, and notable for the scarcity of its furniture, a single chair, table, bed on the floor, and cook-stove, all of the poorest description, comprising its outfit.

A woman was crouching in the chair, before the stove, as if cold. She was meanly clad, her head and the greater portion of her face being enveloped in a white broad-edged cap, which made her pretty effectually unrecognizable, taking into consideration that her eyes were also hidden behind green goggles.

She looked up with a nod, as Baxter entered, and stamped upon the floor with her caue, as she said:

"Be seated, Flem Baxter, fer I see it is you!" was her invitation.

"What will I sit on?" the colonel demanded, looking in horror at the dusty floor. "I see no chair. What am I to sit on?"

"The floor, to be sure. If it ain't too good for my boy, Sam, et ain't too good fer you."

"I prefer to stand. I came to see if you are getting along nicely, Suse?"

"No!" she said, spitefully, without looking up. "I do not get along nicely. The world tricks and cheats me. Money is scarce. Oh! these're sorry times for the poor."

"But, Suse, they tell me you have money in the bank and out at interest—fifty thousand or over."

"They lie! they lie! I have not got a cent. I am poor—penniless," she said, fiercely.

"Ah! too bad; I pity you. If you had married me, Suse, you would now be occupying a position of affluence. But there is a chance for you yet. If you are willing to do a little work, and not be scrupulous as to its nature, I have the place for you at a figure of one hundred dollars."

"One hundred dollars, Flem Baxter?"

"One hundred dollars, Suse—all in good clean money."

"But, stop—perhaps you mean murder! I wouldn't do that, Flem Baxter—at least, not for a hundred dollars."

"This is not murder I would have you do," the colonel said. "Listen, and I'll tell you."

The woman nodded her readiness to hear, and the colonel accordingly told her what she would have to do. It was, in detail, what he had told to Barker, a short time before. Sue was silent as Baxter explained, and when he had finished, she said:

"And you'll give me a hundred dollars to do this?"

"Yes—more. A hundred now—fifty more when the job is done. But, do you mind, you must not appear where you can be recognized again."

"Oh! I understand. Leave that to me. I'll do the job up brown for you, Flem, for the sake of old days, and no one will ever be the wiser for it," Mrs. Snicker said with a chuckle, as she gathered up the bills wh'ch he laid in her lap.

Baxter then took his departure.

"So far, so good," he muttered, as he gained the street. "That is settled, and another surety of ultimate success. The next thing is to arrange some plan to still the original Jack and his champion, the girl detective. He must be collapsed, but no harm must come to her until I find where she has stored Eva."

To get rid of Blakesly, Jr., however, was no small job; he realized this, and he knew he must devise some certain plan.

CHAPTER VII.

VIOLA PURSUES INQUIRIES—JACK, THE BOGUS, EXIT.

A FEW hours later, at night, after his visit to Mrs. Snicker, Baxter entered Chatham street, with its rows of edifices used for every known business purpose, perhaps, under the sun.

Finally arriving at one of the dingiest structures of a dingy block, he made his way upstairs to the second flight, and rapped upon the first door to the right, from the landing.

Above the door a lantern swung upon a bracket, upon the panes of which was inscribed:

"BOB SLUGS; JACK OF ALL TRADES," which very significantly indicated that the

aforesaid "Slugs" was not particular as to the nature of his business so long as the labor was rewarded by an equivalent in cash.

The door was soon opened by a low-browed, villainous-looking little old man, with white hair, mustache, and shaggy eyebrows that partially covered the expression of a small, bead-like pair of eyes. He was shabbily dressed, the only redeeming feature of his attire consisting of a magnificent cable chain of gold set with diamond ornaments, which he wore across his vest.

"Ah! good-evening, Slugs! Do you know'a chap of my persuasions?" Baxter asked, as he entered an office even dingier than the external appearance of the house.

"It depends how remunerative the nature of you visit may be," Slugs replied, dryly. "If there is money ahead, I recognize you as Baxter—if not, I never saw you before."

"You miserable old shyster!" the colonel said, in disgust. "I see you grow more miserly with age. Supposing I have no money and yet want a job done—didn't I serve out an apprenticeship under you, and can't you afford to tip me a helper?"

"No," Slugs answered, flatly, as he dropped into a chair, and lit an old clay pipe, the stem of which had been worn or broken off until none of it, to speak of, remained. "I do business on a cash basis now. If you want anything in my line, pay for it. I turned you loose well enough educated in the ways that are dark, so that you might make your mark in the world, and you can beg no more of me."

"Nor do I wish to, Slugs. I've got money enough to back my craft through rough water. What I want is to hire a trusty hand to put a girl out of the way."

"Ah! that's good. I have reduced my price-list to suit the times. Who is the party?"

"A young snip of a girl who rigs up in pants, and sells papers. Calls herself New York Nell."

"Oh! but you don't mean her?"

"I do, though."

"You're a fool. There isn't a sport in N. Y. who does not know her by sight or hearsay, and respect her, and there's mighty few you'll find, who'd take a turn against her."

"Then you refuse?"

"Positively."

"Then I'll bid you good-evening and look elsewhere. The girl must stop breathing, surely."

"Take my advice, Baxter and let her alone, or she'll turn a trump on you," was the older villain's advice.

In the mean time, things at Hudsondale were progressing after their usual tenor.

The new heir and Miss Vernon had become fully established in the grand mansion, at their ease, and Uncle Redmond moved about the premises with a jolly, satisfied expression upon his genial old phiz.

"And to think," he would say to Miss Prudence, with a visible shaking of his portly sides, with hearty laughter, "that I she'd hev ever'a doubted Jack's bein' my own son! Why, I tell ye, Pru, there's the makin' o' a president in the boy."

"The president of a penitentiary," Miss Blakesly snapped. "Mark my work, Redmond, you're deceived. And worse than all, you're getting mixed up with that unknown adventuress, Miss Vernon."

"Pshaw! fiddlesticks! you're crazy, Prue. But s'posin' I should take a notion ter pop ter ther little woman, Prue—how would it suit? She is good and kind, and would make Hudsondale a good mistress."

"When a new mistress comes let her go into the kitchen and do the housework, then—I'll move!" Prudence retorted, sailing away in high dudgeon.

While Uncle Redmond quietly laughed and hunted up Miss Vernon in a rustic arbor overlooking the sunlit river.

Jack was not with her.

Indeed, since his return from New York, he scarcely found time to more than passingly speak with her, spending a good share of his hours in solitary rambles about the premises, or rides upon the river.

If Viola cared, she did not betray the fact. Indeed, she found it pleasant to entertain good-natured, honest Uncle Redmond, not unconscious of a growing admiration of his sterling qualities.

And as for the old master of Hudsonale, he felt youthful and fascinated in the presence of the pretty Southern girl, seeing in her much to admire and something to love—herself—with all his hearty nature.

The upshot of the matter was a blunt but fervid explanation, and an earnest proposal on Uncle Redmond's part, all of which Miss Vernon received with a sober countenance, but kindling expression of pleasure in her eyes.

"To be sure," Uncle Redmond continued, "mebbe it ain't hardly fair to speak afore the boy, but he's young, an' orter be smart enuff wi' all his college eddication ter get ahead o' his old dad."

"Your son cares nothing for me, I believe, and really, I am not sorry," Viola replied. "The more I see of and understand him, the less I admire him."

"You don't say! Waal, mebbe that's so. But he's my son, an' somehow I'm growin' mighty proud o' his book larnin' an' knowledge of the big arts."

"Then, Mr. Blakesly, do you candidly believe that he is your own son?"

"Why yes—don't you?"

"No, I do not!"

The declaration wrought a change.

Uncle Redmond sprung to his feet and paced about the little arbor in great surprise.

"Tell me the reason!" he finally said, resuming his seat beside her. "Tell me why you do not believe that Jack is my own son?"

"I will first ask you why it was that your son left you years ago?" Miss Vernon said.

"That is easily explained. My boy was of a wild, rollicksome disposition, and could only be kept in the school-room at his studies, and not at work on the farm. He longed for the roving life of hunting and jockeying, too, and seeing no prospect of ever taming him, I started him for the West, some eight years ago, with a hundred dollars in his pocket, and a friendly lift with the

toe of my boot. Of course we parted friends, and my boy promised not to come back until either he had a vast store of education, or an equivalent in precious gold. That's the last I heard of him until he telegraphed me he was coming home."

"Then there is no truth in his story to me of his stealing a charm of you—a golden locket—which he has to return to you intact ere you will admit him as a member of your family?" Viola demanded with flashing eyes.

"Waal, no—not that I know of. Tell me what you mean?" the old man said.

She accordingly did unfold to him the whole story the false heir had told her, as a magnet to draw away the last of her money.

Uncle Redmond listened, with genuine incredulity and amazement.

"Well! well! well!" he ejaculated when she had finished. "If this don't beat my time all holler, may I be sent down tew Sing Sing, fer life. Either you're a plaguey big liar, gal, or else that boy is an infernal rascal—that's all."

"You don't believe me then?"

"Yes, gal. It 'pears to me as how you've been roped in by the chap wuss'n I. But never mind that. I'll make that all square, when you consent to be Mrs. Redmond Blakesly."

"Oh! you are too kind. But—"

"No denurs, at all. Tber old man's tuk a shine ter ye, fer earnest, an' yer little misfortune draws you all the closer to my sympathies. Mebbe ye can stand the old man's society a few years, and help him fight out of this strange battle—then there'll be a grave down in the park on the bluff, leavin' a fair widder at Hudsonale for my boy, should he ever return."

"Oh! Mr. Blakesly, do not talk so. I have as yet given you no hopes that I can ever be aught to you, and were I inclined, I should decline to give you encouragement, while you are in such a mood. I am no fortune-hunter. If I ever marry, it will be only when I have discovered the man I can love. I once thought I cared for your bogus son, but have awakened to find out my mistake."

"But, you do care for me enough to be mine, do you not?"

"I decline to give you an answer, yet. There is a skeleton in your family closet. Miss Prudence told me so. When I have a full understanding of your past, I may be able to give you a decision. Miss Prudence said you have others nearer to you of whom you never speak—it is of those I wish to learn, ere I—I—but never mind what!"

"She referred to my first wife," Uncle Redmond said, gloomily. "I rarely ever speak of her, because she was unworthy. I never saw her after the first month of our marriage, she having absconded, 'tis said, with a man who has been my life-long enemy. The same accursed ruffian afterward wedded my younger sister, under an assumed name, and abused her until she was glad for the privilege to lay down and die, and thus escape his power. The second woman I wedded was an angel, and we lived happily until she died of a fever, leaving two babes, a boy and a girl, aged one and three years, for me to care for. The girl was soon after stolen, and I have never to this day found

a trace of her. I laid her kidnapping at the door of my first and unfaithful wife, but not knowing even her whereabouts, my detectives were never able to gain a clew. She may live still, but I try to hope not, as fears dark and gloomy assail me, and totally unnerve me. That is why I never allude to my long-lost child. As to the viper, she is said to be living, but where I cannot learn—how, I care not to learn."

"My poor friend, how much I pity you I cannot express. Suffice to say, you are in no way blamable for what wrong has been done you, and if I ever conclude to consider your kind proposal, I shall do so fully and freely, believing by my faithful affection I can lift a cloud from the past to let in light and peace of present and future."

"Bless you, my child. May God ever grant you the peace and happiness you can grant me. If you come to me you need have no fear of trouble, for, although I failed to get a divorce from the viper of my first choice, I have no fear that she will ever seek to make me desperate by coming across my path after all these years. Now I will leave you, to look after the impostor!"

The false Jack was found in the parlor, lounging in an easy-chair, while he smoked a handsome pipe and perused the morning paper.

"Ahl is it you, daddy?" he said, looking up pleasantly, as Uncle Redmond came sturdily into the room, thumping his cane on the carpet with more than usual vim. "A terrible fall in stocks on Wall street to-day—bulls and bears in a fight, you see. Got any money out?"

"Not a red. I don't bull nor bear the market, sir. But if I ever do take a hand in bounting out bears, it is about this time o' day. So pick up your duds, young man, and bid yer adieux ter Hudsonale fer good an' all."

"What!" the bogus Jack gasped, leaping to his feet. "Father—"

"Stop!" the old gent roared, sternly. "Don't you call me father, you puppy! Get out of my house—off of my premises at once, or I'll ram you over the skull with my stick. You've played your game well, as far as it went, but it didn't go fur. Your secret is known. The cat's out of the bag, and unless your heels are seen departing from this vicinity in short order, I'll telegraph to New York for a pair of handcuffs."

"But I don't understand," Jack faltered.

"You lie!" Uncle Redmond declared, with increasing emphasis. "You are an impostor and a villain. If you don't believe it, remain here until I get prepared, and I'll prove it to you. If my real boy Jack was here, I'd have him boot you 'way up to Kinderhook an' back again!"

"Then ring the bell for the race to commence, for the original Jack Blakesly is here to take the dramatic part assigned him," a merry, laughing voice exclaimed.

And into the room came two persons, through an open window, which looked out upon the garden—two persons, one of whom was of faultless form and costume, while the other was none other than the long-haired Westerner whom Uncle Redmond had just been wishing to see—Jack Blakesly, the original,

The first person it was who had spoken, and that was New York Nell.

Uncle Redmond immediately recognized her, and put forth his hand.

"So it's you, is it?" he said, heartily. "Glad ye cum, fer I've got a job on my hands of booting out this chap, who has been playing it strong on me in the shape of a son. But I've made up my my mind he is 'possum, and he's a-goin' to walk out."

"Course he's a snide! Didn't I tell you that, over in Philadelphia? Why, Unky, here is your own son, alive and well—this feller with the long hair."

The old man turned and surveyed Jack quite calmly.

"So you say that animal is my boy Jack, eh?" he observed. "Waal, I don't know. S'pect mebbe he mought be, and again, mebbe he moughtn't. The old man ain't a-goin' ter bo tuk in so easy this time, not by a long shot. Howsomever, young feller, if ye've any notion of hitchin' up in relationship, you can't start in any better that to clear out this 'ere feller, who's been imposin' on my ignorance and generosity, by representin' hisself as my boy Jack."

"With the greatest of pleasure," Jack No. 2 replied; and, as good as his word, he stepped quickly forward and seized the bogus heir by the nape of the neck and right leg, and bore him out of the mansion.

Down the lawn he strode as unconcernedly as though he were bearing no burden, and, on arriving at the water's edge, he gave Jack No. 1 a boost that landed him out in the river, where the water was up to his neck.

Uncle Redmond and New York Nell, joined by Viola, watched the proceeding, greatly amused, inasmuch as the victim was greatly frightened and bawled like a whipped schoolboy. Not daring to come ashore again, where the long-haired Westerner stood, the defeated candidate swam down the stream below the bluff, and from there made his retreat to the shore.

Jack No. 2 then joined those who had been admiring his act, and the whole party then returned to the parlor of the mansion, where general introductions and explanations were made.

"Yes, mebbe you're my Jack, and mebbe again you ain't," Redmond said, surveying the new candidate critically. "I'm goin' ter bo sure, this time. Whar'd you pick him up, Nellie?"

"In N. Y.," Nell replied. "He sed his name was Carson, but I cornered him, and found out he was your son, instead of the t'other 'un whom I reckon you'll find is the son of Colonel Baxter, who has been settin' him on."

"Oho! so that devil has been connected with this case, eh? I did not suspect that, despite the fact that I met him in Philadelphia. I see plainly where the impostor picked up his p'ints, now. As for you, young man, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Not a great deal, either way," Jack replied, indifferently. "I am your progeny if it suits your notion; if it don't, it's all the same to me. I am not particular except for relation's sake, as I have a snug fortune to back my career through this weary vale of tears."

"Well, well! you don't seem very anxious, that's a fact."

"Nor am I. If you've got any one in mind, whom you think you'd like better, take your choice. If you see anything of the Blakesly kind about me, all correct; I'm your son."

"Well, young man, I'll deliberate on it," Uncle Redmond said, with a dig at the bald spot on his head. "Thar's only one thing about ye, as puts me forcibly in mind o' my Loy Jack, of years ago, an' that's yer hair. Jack allus was thunderiu' lazy about gettin' his wool clipp'd, and I've give him many a whaling because he'd spend the money I gave him, fer cigars, instead of hair cutting."

"The peculiarity still clings to me—not because of the reason you mention, now, but because barbers were among the things we seldom saw up at the mining-camp where I held out. B'iled shirts were the next scarcest."

The conversation ran along smoothly, and without Jack's making any attempt to ingratiate himself.

Toward evening New York Nell signified her intention of returning to the city, but upon being urged, Jack finally consented to remain at Hudsonale, as a guest, until the morrow.

During the fore part of the evening Viola presided at the piano, and both surprised and delighted her hearers by her skill and proficiency in music.

Jack retired early on the plea of weariness, and Viola was not long behind him, in going to her room.

Uncle Redmond always was the last up, in the mansion, at night, as he gave the closing of doors and windows his personal supervision.

To night he was interrupted in the midst of his work by a ring at the front door bell.

In some surprise, he grasped his stout cane, and went to answer the summons, just in time to see a female figure retreating through the moonlight toward the park upon the bluff.

He at once called to her, but received no reply.

Again he shouted after her, with the same result.

Then, firing up with indignation, he grasped his cane, firmly, and hobbled off in pursuit as fast as lay in his power.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCORE ONE FOR BAXTER.

UNCLE REDMOND, although obliged, in a measure, to use a cane for self-support, could get over the ground with considerable activity, when the case demanded, and more especially when in pursuit of vengeance.

Therefore, he was not long in catching up with the retreating woman, inasmuch as she was not apparently in any great hurry. He overtook her in the park, just at the edge of the bluff or cliff which dropped so precipitously off into the stately Hudson.

"Stop!" he said, authoritatively, laying his left hand firmly upon her shoulder, and raising his cane. "Are you deaf, that you didn't hear me speak before?"

"No!" the woman replied—"No, Redmond Blakesly. I heard you, and should have heeded, only I wanted to draw you out here,

where I could talk to you in private. Look! do you know me, Redmond Blakesly?"

And upon Hudsonale's rotund and genial master was turned a ghastly face—a wrinkled, puckered visage, the greater part of which was hidden within a great cap.

Only one glimpse Uncle Redmond got, then the head was jerked to one side and the view obstructed.

"No! I'll be hanged if I know who ye are, ner do I care, either!" he said gruffly. "What I want to know is, what business have you got prowling round these premises?"

"The business of a mistress, you old fool—the business of a wife and mistress. Ha! ha! don't you know me, now? I am your own darling first love and long-ks. bride—yes, I am Hester Blakesly!"

Uncle Redmond leaped back as though he had been dealt a blow—and in fact, he had.

"You lie!" he gasped, hoarsely.

"I do not lie!" the woman replied, with a tantalizing laugh. "I am who and what I claim—your first and only wife—and I've got a little certificate, among my effects, which will prove it!"

"You viper! you wretch!" Uncle Redmond fairly shouted in a rage. "I know you lie—I know you are not the faithless one who deserted me years ago. You have about you no trace of resemblance to her."

"But I have her spirit and her tongue. If you remember, she was gifted with a superfluity of both. What other personal beauties I possessed so many years ago, high living and dissipation have consumed. Timo works miracles, you know, Redmond."

"Yes; and I'll work miracles with you if you do not leave my premises."

"Oh, no you won't, my beloved husband. I am legally and lawfully your wife, and I've just as much right here as you, and confidently expect and intend to maintain it."

"By thunder, no! Blast my old eyes if ye do that!" the old man said, in a determined way. "You disgraced me years ago, you old devil; you shall not add further to the same blow. Either you'll go away from here willingly, promising never to trouble me again, or I'll give you such a drubbing as you never got before!"

"Drub as much as you please, Redmond, for I can stand it. I've been beaten until I'm without a particle of feeling. And, as for leaving, I certainly shall not. I came here to take up my position as mistress of your household and your affairs, and shall soon blossom forth into a full-blown leader in fashionable society. Then I'll make your bank account look weak, I surmise. Ha! ha! aren't you glad of my advent, dear husband? Of course you are. Any one can see that in the placidity of your countenance. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Curse you, woman! curse you! I was given to cursing you years ago—I am not backward in doing it now, and you have earned it all."

"Oh! yes; I don't deny anything. I always own up to the truth. I gave you cause to curse me, years ago, and I have come back to give you another racket now. If possible, I intend to make your life more wretched than it ever was."

before. Come, I'll give you my arm, and let's go to the house."

"Never! I'd sooner touch a rattlesnake. Go away, I tell ye—leave my premises, or I swear you shall have cause to repent it. Go, at once!"

"Bah! talk to the wind. I am going to the mansion."

"Devil, go at your peril!"

The woman laughed scornfully, and took two or three steps toward the house.

With a gasp of anger, Uncle Redmond flew at her and aimed a blow at her head with his heavy cane.

The blow missed the mark a half-foot, because she darted back, with an agile spring.

It was a fatal move, for, standing just at the edge of the cliff as she had been, while speaking, she now went backward into the yawning space—down, down, through mid-air, into the deep, dark river, in a spot where the shadows lay darkly.

"My God! what have I done!" Uncle Redmond exclaimed, rushing to the edge of the cliff with a horrified expression of countenance. "I have been the means of sending her to a watery grave!"

It seemed even so, for, although he peered from the cliff down upon the water, he did not behold the old woman come to the top. She had sunk to the bottom, to rise no more!

With a groan, Uncle Redmond at last arose to his feet, and turned toward the mansion. But he paused with a start!

If he was horrified at the fate of the woman, he was startled to see Colonel Baxter and another man standing but a few yards away—the colonel with folded arms, and a triumphant smile about his sensual lips.

His companion was attired in the uniform of the New York police.

A bar of bright moonlight penetrated down through the overhanging tree-tops and lit the bluff where the trio stood facing each other.

"Well! well! well!" Baxter said, sarcastically using Uncle Redmond's own favorite expression of astonishment. "This is a strange position to find you in, old friend. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I should never have believed you guilty of such a crime. Too bad—too bad for you, Uncle Blakesly!"

"What—what do you mean?" the old man gasped, whitening. "Surely you do not accuse me of—of—"

"Knocking that poor woman over and pushing her into the river—exactly!" Baxter replied. "Surely you do not deny it?"

"I do deny it, I struck at her, I'll admit, but did not hit her. She dodged me and backed off over the cliff."

"Ah! yes—but that's too thin. It won't stand picking. We arrived just in time to see you strike the woman, and hear the whack. Didn't we, officer?"

"Yes, we did that," the policeman replied. "Therefore, Redmond Blakesly, you stand before us, and your God, a man upon whose soul is written the stain of murder, and it is our duty to arrest you for the crime!" said Baxter.

"Your duty! What d'ye mean? You're not the law!" Uncle Redmond cried.

"But, we are both servants thereof," Baxter

said. "I am a detective, and my companion here is an officer of the New York Police Force. We came here on a different mission from this. The old woman you just murdered was under our eye, suspected of burglary, and we took the pains to follow her up here into the country, hoping to get a clew on which to arrest and incarcerate her. Instead, we have been so unlucky as to be in at the death."

"God help me!" Uncle Redmond gasped. "I am not guilty—no, I am not guilty. I struck at the woman, but, failed to hit her. Believe me, gentlemen, this is true. You saw the act, ye say—p'raps ye overheard the conversation, an' know to what a test I was put. Spare me then, from arrest and disgrace, in my old age. Et ain't long the old man will live, so let me go unmolested I beg."

"Ha! ha! this is my revenge, Redmond Blakesly!" the colonel retorted. "It is triumph to hear you beg of me! Awhile ago you held the trump—now I have it in my grasp. But, I fear it is utterly useless for you to ask quarter of me, as murder is a crime that should never escape gallows justice. Still, I will consider. Perhaps we can make some terms. If you will invite us to your mansion, and offer us its hospitalities, for a few days, I will think the matter over, and see what I can do for you."

Uncle Redmond bowed his head upon his arm, as it leaned against the tree near which he stood, and was silent for several moments.

He saw what was the destined result, as he reflected.

On the one hand was arrest, a prison cell, and eventually, the gallows—on the other, Baxter held his own sway, and would insist upon whatsoever tyranny he might deem best; the first act of which would be the restoration of the false heir to the position he had been so summarily dismissed from.

There was then but two choices—the one gall, the other wormwood.

Uncle Redmond, fully aware that he was in one sense no longer his own master, resolved to acquiesce and await his chance, trusting in God to clear him of the coil that was winding about him.

"Come!" he said, finally, "you shall be my guest. How about the officer? For him to be seen here will excite suspicion."

"True. Montford you may return to town. When I need you I will send for you," Baxter ordered.

The policeman bowed and strode away through the park; then Uncle Redmond led the way to the mansion, and showed Baxter to a comfortable apartment.

"Don't worry about your fate," the polished villain said, with a smirk, as the victim of his machinations was about to leave. "I am not naturally so bad a fellow to get along with as some would like to make me out. If you accept my terms, all will be well, and no one will ever be the wiser for the little occurrence of tonight."

Uncle Redmond bowed himself out, with a troubled face, and when once locked within his room, he pillow'd his head in his hands and wept.

"God help me," he muttered. "I am in the

power of the devil now, and have no chance to rebel. I am a slave to my life-long enemy, and he will show me no mercy—no mercy!"

Baxter and his tool had not been the only ones upon the scene at the bluff that night. The frowning old park contained many fantastically shaped shadows, and among them another woman stood.

She never stirred from the position she occupied from the time she entered the park, a few minutes in advance of Uncle Redmond and the ill-fated Hester, until she left the park again, a short time after the villain, Baxter, and his prey had departed for the mansion.

She had seen everything—overheard everything that had transpired, all without visible affection, and soon after Uncle Redmond left for the mansion, she made her way from the grounds and along the river road to the first railway station, a distance of some three miles.

She was attired in a long linen duster and fashionable bonnet, but her face was closely screened from view by a heavy veil.

On arriving at the station she got aboard a train bound for New York, and later was steamed away toward the metropolis.

A few hours afterward she was installed in a pretty room at the St. George Hotel, and with pen, ink and paper before her on the table, busied herself in writing.

For hours she plied a rapid pen, and then finished with a sigh, just as the first beams of daylight streaked into her room. A short nap she then took in an easy-chair, after which she ordered and partook of her breakfast in her room. With her hat and veil removed, she proved to be an elderly woman.

Upon her face, which had once been handsome, were grave lines and furrows that trouble had wrought, and in her eyes a sorrowful, tearful expression that seemed to define untold anguish. Her hair was as white, too, as driven snow.

After breakfast she donned her hat, veil and wrappings, and betook herself to the street. There, signaling a cab, she entered, and gave the directions.

Later she was deposited in Baxter street, and found herself knocking at the door of Nell Niblo's room, in the old tenement. Our heroine answered the summons in person, and invited the stranger to enter, while rubbing her eyes, for she had evidently just awokened from a late slumber.

"You are Nelly Niblo, the news girl, are you not?" the veiled woman said, as she took a seat.

"'Spect that used to be me—but since then I've shifted around so that I now stand in as New York Nell, the detective."

"Oh!" the woman said with a little laugh.

"Well, it is all the same. Do you know Redmond Blakesly, of Hudsondale?"

"Reckon I do. What of him?"

"I have a letter here I would like you to take to him. Also, I want you to take along with you the young woman you rescued from the burning boat. When you arrive at the mansion contrive to have your interview take place in the presence of all that are about the premises. You are then to open this letter and read it aloud. It will fully explain itself, and everything necessary."

"And you want me to do all this?"

"I do."

"But I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't allow myself to fall into none of your traps—oh! no. You'd like me to bring the young lady from her hiding-place, wouldn't you, so that Baxter could gobble her up?"

"You mistake. I have no such desire or intention. I already know where Eva—the girl you rescued is concealed, and could have had her spirited away a dozen different times, had it been my wish. I assure you I mean her only what is good."

"How can you? What proof have I that there is not some game afoot?"

"When I swear to you that I am the girl's own mother, had not that ought to satisfy you?" the woman asked.

"I suppose so. But, you see, Eva told me that she did not have a mother! How's that?"

"Easy enough to explain. She has never known me as a mother, but as an aunt. The secret of this both she and you shall know when the letter is perused at Hudsonale."

"Then give me the letter and I will do as you say. What's the salary?"

"I will give you twenty dollars. That will pay your two fares to Hudsonale, and leave you considerable for your trouble."

"All right. When's the starting time for the biz?"

"To-morrow morning will do. No!—better say Friday, when I come to think of it. Today is Wednesday. Friday will be best."

The woman then placed a twenty-dollar note in Nell's hands, and took her departure.

She went from Baxter street to the nearest district telegraph station, and paid for and caused to be sent the following telegram to Redmond Blakesly:

"Do not be frightened by threats. Hold your own. Help will come when needed. ALLSEEK."

This telegram was handed to Uncle Redmond that day, about noon, as he sat beside one of the fountains in the park.

He read it in great surprise, then dismissed the messenger.

"Who could have sent that?" he wonderingly murmured. "Some one else must have been present, who foresees hope for me. God be praised then, if hope there is, for I have purposely avoided meeting that devil, Baxter, dreading the consequences. This message is at least comforting."

And it was.

He cheered up wonderfully from its influence—so much that he was so calm, that he was surprised at himself.

He returned to the mansion and found Baxter lounging in the parlor.

Jack and Miss Vernon were seated at the rustic table on the veranda, overlooking the Hudson, engaged in a social game of chess, in which both appeared to be deeply engrossed.

So Uncle Redmond did not interrupt them, but passed into the parlor, where Baxter was seated.

"Ah! it's you, is it?" the colonel said, looking up from his paper. "Where have you been hiding all the morning?"

"I have not been hiding, sir," was Uncle Redmond's reply. "I have nothing to hide for."

"Bah! you hide because you fear me—because you dread the vengeance you have a right to expect from me."

"No; I do not even fear you," was the reply, again, in a collected way.

"What! do not fear me, whose power it is to send you to the scaffold, or to liberate you?"

"No; I do not fear you. Nor do I believe you have power to send me to the scaffold. In fact, Baxter, I surmise that ye'd better not be too fast. Mebbe you've got the whip row just now, in your own opinion, but that's no tellin' but what the old man may get in a few, yet. Read that.

He handed the colonel the strange telegram he had received, and the polished villain read it over, a faint scowl wrinkling his forehead.

"Well, what does that signify?" he carelessly asked, as he returned it. "I see nothing in it."

"I see hope—liberty—escape from your villainous clutches," Uncle Redmond said, forcing an appearance of considerable confidence. "Look out, I'm going to struggle, man."

"Bah! again. You are going to do as I say. Come around in about an hour and we will talk on business."

"I am in no hurry, yet; any time within a week will do."

"Hardly!" Baxter hissed, leaping to his feet, after his victim had gone. "Things look squally—there is need for more work!"

CHAPTER IX.

JACK THE BOGUS WEAKENS—A GERMAN RECRUIT.

He foresaw that there was trouble brewing.

The telegram itself suggested strongly that there was some one else who knew something about the dark business at the bluff. Who could it be?

"I'll wager my head it's the snip of a girl detective, New York Nell," the colonel growled, darkly. "She's sticking her nose into every one's business, lately, curse her, and it is vitally necessary that she keeps more quiet. Perhaps she may have seen old Suse Sicker creep from the water, or may possess some other equally important proof that would disarm me of my power over Blakesly. This must not be. It must be nipped in the bud. Already the old man has half a notion to resist. Should he get further encouragement, open defiance to my wishes would follow. It therefore remains for me to see that this boy-girl is summarily disposed of. As for the fellow, who claims to be the real Jack Blakesly, if he, too, were to drop out of existence, it would augur well for us. I must bunt up my Jack, and set him at this long-haired pilgrim, while I look after the girl. I will first see Blakesly, and we will come to terms—easy terms, for the present. The screw-press can be instituted when it becomes necessary."

He found Uncle Redmond in the garden, a half-hour later, superintending the work there. At a beckon, the old man followed his persecutor to a neighboring arbor, and the two men took seats, facing each other.

"I came to talk on business," the colonel an-

nounced, briefly. "I am going down to New York to-day, and shall probably return late, to-night. I want to know if I am to bring the occision back with me or not; shall I understand that you defy my power, or submit to it?"

"Ye can understand just as ye please. I'd advise ye to go slow, an' not attempt to exercise your power, as ye call it."

"Then, listen. I shall send my claimant back here, and you must install him as your heir, in place of the long-haired puppy, and both he and I shall have the privileges of your possessions. If this is agreeable, for the present I will not bring the policeman with me, on my return. Otherwise, I shall, and to-morrow's sunset shall find you luxuriating in the N. Y. Tombs, for murdering your own wife. I will step over to the stable and order your carriage to take me to the depot; you can ruminate until my return, when I shall expect an answer."

"Hold on. You can have it now. Send on your man, and you shall have your wishes—until I get some ground for the defensive. Then, I shall turn the tables."

"Oh! I'll run all risk of that. Be kind enough to advise the long-haired pilgrim that his presence is no longer desirable here."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. He is my son—of that I am fully satisfied—and he shall have all the hospitalities my house affords."

"Oh! very well; I am not particular, only I thought it would be to your advantage, and his health to get him out of the way."

The colonel strode away toward the stables then, with a mocking laugh. A few minutes later he was driven away in Uncle Redmond's grand barouche toward the railway station.

On arriving there, he made inquiries and learned that his coadjutor was at the village tavern, and on search found him there, half drunk on the poison they sold over the bar.

Arousing him, the colonel led the way to a room, and gave him a chair.

"Sit down, you fool!" he said, sharply. "I am ashamed of you!"

"What do I care?" Jack retorted, with a scowl. "Can't a feller have a little fun?"

"I'll give you fun, you drunken idiot. What did you leave Hudsonale for when that long-haired devil came?"

"Couldn't help it, daddy. The long-haired fellow throwed me out!" Jack replied, the picture of innocence.

"Throwed you out?"

"Yes—picked me up, and throwed me out into the river."

"Oh! you baby! you ninny! you sickly fool!" the colonel raved.

"Yes, I know I am, daddy; but really I couldn't help it. I got it all from you."

"Take care, boy!"

"No, I won't. It's true. An' that Western feller is awful strong."

"Bosh! I could handle him easy enough. I've slain better warriors than he with my little finger."

"In your mind. It won't wash, dad. Didn't I see you laid out stiff by this same coon? Can't come it over me. We are both cowards, and there's no use denying it."

The elder villain fairly overflowed with rage,

"I'll kill you if you don't hold your infernal tongue!" he swore. "You've got to go back to Hudsondale."

"What! where the Westerner is?"

"Exactly, sir."

"No, I'll be hanged if I will. I don't want my head cracked."

"No danger of that happening. Besides, I will pay you enough so you can afford to take a flogging."

"Thanks. Money is no temptation. But I will go on one consideration."

"Name it, then."

"It is simple. A basket of champagne."

"You will go for that?"

"I will."

"Then I'll send it up direct from the city. There is something else I want you to do, however."

"What?"

"I'll tell you. The Westerner and a girl in New York, named New York Nell, must be put out of the way ere we can hold a show at Hudsondale."

"Why so?"

"Because the man is dangerous, and the girl because she is sharp and crafty. I will attend to her case, while you look after your rival."

"But, how? I don't like to tackle him openly. He might lay me out, you see."

"Don't do it openly. There are a score of ways of doing for him. Take him when he is asleep, for instance, or slip a knife into his ribs, or drug him."

Jack looked dubious.

"I'll try," he said, "but most likely I'll be the one who'll get switched off the track and take a term ticket in Sing Sing."

Colonel Baxter left for New York by the next train.

Immediately upon setting foot in the metropolis, he made his way to the Bowery, and into one of the dives, for which it is famous.

The dive was a saloon in the basement of a building that was used for mercantile purposes. The saloon was well filled with a delegation of city roughs.

Passing into the room beyond the saloon, to which a narrow hallway led from the outside, Baxter found himself in the theater, or concert-room—quite a spacious, but low-ceiled apartment, furnished with several hundred seats, and a stage at the opposite side, for performances.

There was no performance, now, however, and the auditorium was deserted. Without noticing this fact, however, Baxter descended a side aisle, and entered through a narrow door upon the stage, and made his way to the further side of the platform where he encountered a man engaged in mixing a bucket of paint for the purpose of daubing over a stretch of neighboring canvas, into a fairy scene. He was a villainous looking old German, with long stringy black hair, little peering eyes, and a red hooked-nose, while in girth he was of great dimensions.

He looked up with a nod of recognition, as the colonel approached, his eyes emitting a peculiar sparkle.

"Wie gahts!" he saluted. "How you vas, so long since, mynheer Baxter?"

"Good. How's yourself, Fritz?"

"Bad—very bad! Dot establishments dey vas make me vork yust so mooch like von dog, unt den dey don'd vas giff me some monish."

"Oh! that's it? Well, Fritz, I've come to the conclusion that nothing pays so well as anti-scruples and cash jobs, you say."

"Eh? How vas dot? Aunty's sgrubles unt cash jobs you say?"

"Exactly. It's all bosh this living honest all one's life, and poorer than a church mouse. Now, listen! I have a cash job for you, with the money waiting for you, as soon as the job is completed."

"Yaw! dot vas goot. But, what vas de shob you want me to do, and how much you giff me?"

"I want you to put a check on the breath of a girl—that is to say—I want you to kill her. The pay for you will be one hundred dollars."

"For true—so much ash all dose?"

"Just as I tell you. When I am convinced that you have forever hushed the girl, a straight hundred will I give you."

"Den I vas your man. How shall I fix de matter?"

"To suit yourself, so that you make sure, and don't mention names in connection."

"All right. Giff me der description unt I leave der stage, und do de shob fer der hundred dollars."

"The girl I want fixed calls herself New York Nell. She dresses in boy's clothes, and does detective biz. Used to peddle papers cn the street, by the way."

"Yaw! yaw! I dink ash how I knows her. I will settle her account burty soon, und come for my hundred dollars. Vere vill I find you, Mister Baxter?"

"At the Union Place, any time to-day—or, at Hudsondale, up on the Hudson, after to-day."

"Ferry well. I vill hunt for you, unt if I don'd vas find you, I vill advertise for you."

Baxter then took his departure.

"That settles the girl into a snug reposing-place in her native soil," he muttered. "Fritz will do as he agrees, and it behooves me to hang around, and fulfill my part."

Fritz had served an apprenticeship at the business before this, and knew pretty nearly how to go to work.

He immediately quitted the dive and went to a tenement-house in a narrow street not far from the Bowery. Seeking a room upon the second floor, where dirt, cobwebs and scarcity of furniture were chief characteristics, he called to a little boy who was playing in the hallway.

"Mine goot leedle yellow, you vas kno' Jamey Murphy?" he inquired, slipping a nickel into the child's hand. "Den yust you go tell Jamey dot an old Dutchman vants to see him."

The boy skurried away in delight.

Fritz, after the urchin's departure, threw himself upon the dirty cot bed in one corner of the apartment, and looked sick. Perhaps few artists in expression could look as woe-begone and miserable as the Dutchman when he chose. It was a trick, this one he now contemplated, which he had successfully worked many times before, and which had brought him in considerable ill-gotten cash.

Jamey Murphy soon put in an appearance—a

strapping, red-headed Irish youth, with a bulldog face, and a physique that denoted great strength.

"Did yez sind for me, Fritz?" he asked, eying the German critically.

"Dot ish so," the Teuton replied. "I vas sick, Jamey. I vas goin' to cross oser der rivers mit der angels. I vants you to do somedings mit me."

"Phat would yez have, Fritz? Faith it's many a sly lager ye've smuggled to me, an' if I can do yez a turn, here's my will."

"Dot ish right. I vas ferry sick, poy, unt I vants to dell some dings mit a detective. You know der gal, New York Nell?"

"I've seen her, sur."

"An' do ye subbose ash how you can find her?"

"S'pect mebbe."

"Then, off you vill pe so kindness, yust send dat gal to me. Tell her dot a dyin' Dutchmans vant to see her apout some propertie."

"Faith, an' it's mesilf will be doin' the same, an' after ye'r dead, Dutchy, I'll be applyin' fer your job at the dive," was the comforting assurance of Jamey, as he marched away out of the room.

After he was gone, Fritz found himself well enough to sit up and smoke his pipe.

But he was back on the cot again in a twinkling, groaning mournfully, when he heard footsteps approaching the door.

A moment later New York Nell entered the room, closing the door behind her.

"Are you the person who wanted to see me?" she asked, approaching the bed.

"Yaw, I vas der barty," the German answered. "I ish dying, unt I vant to hire you to do somedings for me. Vil you?"

"Well, that depends, my German friend, what your wants may be," Nell replied, taking a seat, and lighting a cigarette. "You don't look very funeralistic."

"Vot is dot?" Fritz inquired, doubtfully "Vot vas funeralistic?"

"I meant to say that you do not look very much like a corpse."

"But you vas misdaken. I vas purdy near deadt, honest. I haff a cancer in my stumache, und der doctor dell me off I vas got some dings to make straight mit deir crookedness, better I vas tend to 'em. So I send to ask if you vill do somedings for a poor deadt mans, who don'd vas got some friends in der worldt?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Spill out what you want to say, and I'll tell you afterwards."

"You ish von detectives, leedle girl?"

"S'pect I am."

"Und you ish ohnest mit der helpless Dutchmans?"

"Bet yer boots I never was dishonest yet, when I know'd it."

"Dot is goot. Dot makes me like you most like der fraulein I left over in Germany. I dell you vat I vants. I haff no friends in der world, yet I haff some moneys vot I earned some days since I coome to America. There pe several t'ousand dollars of dis moneys, und I pury him mit a tin box, mit der ground, oop along der Hudson River. But, now, as I vas goin' to die, I vants you to get dish moneys for me, und I giff you some of it."

"Well, now, that hits me, uncle. Give us your directions, and I'm off like a Fourth of July firecracker."

"You vil pe honest, und pring pack all der moneys to me, first?"

"On course I will. Hope I may be shot if I play shenanigan."

"All right. I tells you, den. You know up along der Hudson dot place vot dey vas call Schneider's Inlet?"

"Bet I do."

"Vel, you hire von leetle tug-boat, an' ride up to der mouth off der inlet, an' get out on der furder point. Look sharper, und you find a pig flat stone mit some ashes on top where von fire haff been puilt. You get you some stick, und pry up der stone, und in von leedle hole you find a tin box, vot gondains der money. See?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Vel, dot ish goodt. You den come pring pack der box to me, unt I giff you ein—swi—five hundred dollars."

"Well, that ain't bad. But suppose you've passed in your checks when I get back?"

Fritz caused his countenance to elongate, dolorfully.

"Vel, if I ish dead, den you keeps der whole, unt giff me a pig funeral, vid a lager beer supper afterwards."

"Correct. I'll do that, my old boy. When had I best go for the cash?"

"If you vas not one cowards, it would be bettor for you to wait til purdy near dark, so dot nopodys would see you dig up der box und sdeal him from you."

"All right. If the water is not too rough, I'll row up in a skiff?" Nell said, as she turned to go.

Schneider's Inlet was merely the mouth of a small creek that flowed into the Hudson, some ten or twelve miles up that beautiful stream.

Shadows were gathering thick that evening, when a man appeared at the western point of land that was bounded by the waters of the creek and river, on two sides.

He peered anxiously down the river, as if awaiting some one's coming, then sneaked stealthily back into the cover of the timber, carrying in his hand a small rifle.

The man, of course, was the villainous Dutchman, Fritz, lying in wait for the victim of his cunning but murderous scheme.

"It vas time she comed," he growled, a fiery glitter in his eyes. "I no like her stay avay so long, vor my courage ish already up, und my hands pimepy get unsteady mit der ichin' for dot hundred dollars vot Baxter promised me."

He passed the big stone that had some time served as a fire-place for a camping-out party, and ensconced himself in the bushes beyond, out of sight.

An hour passed, and the murderous schemer still crouched silent and motionless in his position among the bushes.

A moon came up, shot long bars of moonlight down into the woodland.

Sharp and penetrating, the German's gaze peered straight before him, marking every object closely as far as he could see.

Presently the sound of a footfall came to his sharp hearing.

In an instant he was doubly on the alert, with his rifle cocked and ready for use. And not too soon for his villainous purpose.

The moment following he caught sight of a female figure away among the trees, standing silent and motionless, as if in an attitude of listening. The face was turned from him, looking toward the river.

Raising his rifle to his shoulder, he glanced along the barrel and fired.

A piercing shriek answered the report, and the figure fell prone to the earth.

With a hoarse laugh he then seized his hat, and retreated rapidly from the scene of his foul deed.

CHAPTER X.

THE CONCLUDING ACT.

COLONEL BAXTER sat up until past midnight, that night, and was rewarded by an expected visit from Fritz.

"Well?" he said, inquiringly, as the German entered.

"Vel!" Fritz replied, "I fixed her."

"You are sure?"

"Yaw! I ish sure. I vaited for her at an appointed place, and plugged her right through der brains mit a rifle ball."

"How do you know?"

"Because I went up and examined after I had killed her."

"And she was quite dead?"

"Yaw! deader as a door nail. There was no life left in her."

"Well, I'll believe you, till I learn better. If I find you have been cheating me, I'll have you arrested for the crime."

"But where pe my moneys?"

"Here is the amount—a hundred-dollar note. Take it and begone. And mind, you infernal beer soaker, if you ever open your mouth as to this transaction between us, I'll see that you fill an early grave!"

Glad to get his blood-money, Fritz nodded acquiescence, and took his leave.

After he had gone, Baxter smote the table beside him with his fist, to emphasize his satisfaction.

"One more obstacle removed!" he said, with a hiss. "The next is at Hudsonale, for which place I must make an early departure."

He took the first train in the morning, accompanied by the policeman, who had been with him before, at the time of the cliff tragedy, and who now wore citizen's attire over his official suit.

They arrived at Hudsonale too late for breakfast, but Baxter coolly ordered one, with as much nonchalance as though he were in fact the master, instead of the guest.

After breakfast, Baxter sought his son, and found him in his room, with his head bandaged up, while he sat bolstered up in an easy-chair, with a stand beside him containing several bottles of liquor.

"Well, what now?" the colonel growled, in disgust. "Who's been punching your head?"

"That awful Western feller," Jack gasped, faintly. "He caught me slipping something into his coffee, and knocked me down."

"You dolt! you idiot! what did you do then?"

"He made me beg his pardon—then I crawled up here to doctor up."

Baxter, Sr., fairly howled with rage.

"I've a notion to kill you!" he roared, drawing a pistol.

"Do!" Jack said, beseechingly. "I'd rather die than live."

"Death would be too good for you," Baxter snarled. "Oh! you're a disgrace to the human race—you poor cowardly idiot—you groveling sneak of a cur! I'm ashamed to stand in your presence."

"Then get out of it. I don't care. If you're so brave, go sample the fellow, yourself. He'll thump daylights out of you in a second."

The colonel gritted his teeth together.

"I wish I was handy with my fists, and soon I'd show you," he growled.

He left the room and descended to the veranda, where Jack was seated, smoking a cigar.

"See here, you young long-haired puppy, are you the person who struck my friend, Jack Blakesly?"

"I dare say I am the pilgrim who put a head upon a young snob whom I caught putting poison into my coffee, if that's the one you refer to," Jack replied, rising to his feet. "As to the preferred title of 'puppy,' allow me to thank you for applying your own Christian title to one undeserving of the honor."

Baxter flushed red.

"Curse your impudence!" he cried, hotly. "If I had my cane here I'd chastise you."

"Bah! the cane is an instrument used by the aged, decrepit, lazy and cowardly. Men use nature's weapons, out in our country."

"Thank you. I am not a pugilist," Baxter replied. "I came to say that if you laid a hand on my friend Blakesly again, I'll break your head—that's all. Good-day."

"But hold on. If you wish, I can go up and clean out the poisoner at once, so as to give you the desired opportunity."

The colonel stalked on into the house, however, apparently terribly deaf, while Jack reseated himself, with a laugh, to finish his cigar.

"That devil has obtained some mysterious power over my father," he mused, "but I'll be shot if he shall exhibit much of it around here while I'm about. He's got my record to heart from the old mining days, and I guess he won't attempt to hurt me much, unless it is in a sly, stealthy way. He's off for an interview with the old gent now. I wonder what's to pay?"

Baxter was bent on interviewing Uncle Redmond, as Jack had surmised, and found him in the library at his desk, engaged in writing.

"Good!" the polished villain said, entering, and closing the door behind him, after which he drew a chair up to the desk. "While you have your pen ready you and I had best settle our affairs."

"Oh! we hed, hed we?" Uncle Redmond grunted, staring over his glasses. "Waal, I ain't so sure about that. I ain't ready yet."

"On the contrary, you are just ready—to go to jail, if you do not come to terms. The policeman is lounging in the park yonder, and a single call from me to him will bring him here to arrest you."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Money first. You can make me out a check for what spare cash you have got in the bank. When you have done that you may write me out a clear deed to the rest of your properties, and I will call our business square!"

"You are sure?"

"Oh! yes—quite positive."

"And I suppose thereafter, I and my family can skin out, and leave you in possession?"

"Exactly. These are my absolute and only terms, and you can either accept them, or start for jail within the next hour. See! I have my signal whistle. Write me out the requisites and sign them, at once, or I will blow for the officer."

"Then, blow at once," Uncle Redmond said, quietly, "for I have thought the matter over, and fully decided to accept arrest, and imprisonment, ay, even death, rather than accede to a single one of your villainous demands. There! that is fully as final a conclusion as your own—my absolute and only terms."

"Then, by Heaven, you shall feel my power, and I'll trump in a deal on your wealth yet," Baxter cried, as he blew the whistle fiercely.

Uncle Redmond went on with his writing, but from the nervousness of his hand, it was evident that he was somewhat agitated.

A servant immediately answered this strange summons, and Baxter said:

"Be kind enough to send up Mr. Montford Green—the gentleman that came with me, this morning."

"Yes, and you may also fetch along Miss Vernon, and Jack," Uncle Redmond added. "I'd rather be taken before the full army than as a lone soldier on the field. Yes, yes. Bring along Jack and Miss Vernon."

"You are foolish," Baxter sneered, "to wish to make your disgrace public?"

"That is my business. I don't ask any advice from you. I realize that you, by some devilish scheme I cannot account for, have got me into a trap. That ought to satisfy you. If I die, however, I shall die game, and innocent of the charge you prefer. Better than all, I have made a will, and placed it in safe hands, that will baffle you of all hope of fingering my property."

"Curse you! you are lying to me!"

"No, I am not. But, here they come. Proceed with your devilish design."

As he spoke, the door opened, and Jack and Miss Vernon entered, accompanied by the man Green, now arrayed in his official uniform.

Both Uncle Redmond and Baxter then arose.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the latter said, mockingly, "it becomes my painful duty to arrest this man Redmond Blakesly for the crime of murder, which he was seen to commit night before last. I have endeavored to arrange with him so that he need not be taken, but he refused all the advances I made, and therefore must deal with the law. Officer, arrest him."

"Touch him, Sir Officer, at your peril!" Long Haired Jack replied, sternly. "Just wait a bit, until I get a peep at this matter. Father, is there any truth in this accusation?"

"No—in the face of Truth, no! A woman exasperated me to that extent that I rushed at her to strike her, but before I could touch her, she backed into the river and disappeared. I am not guilty of murder."

"You lie—you struck her with the cane and both the officer and myself are ready to swear to it. The courts are the proper mediums to render a verdict in this case. Arrest him, Green."

"Not yet, if you please, Mr. Baxter!" a cool voice cried, and Nell Niblo came sauntering into the room, in her jaunty way. "If you please, Mr. Baxter, I want to say something. Come in, my friends."

And in answer to her call, there entered the room, Mr. Valentine Vernon, Sam Snicker, bootblack, and a pale-faced intellectual-looking girl of some twenty-four summers.

Baxter grew livid, and a gasp escaped from between his shut teeth.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am here on business," Nell now announced, with a smile. "I have arranged a sort of surprise party, with a view to giving you all a little treat. I scarcely know where to commence, but think proper first to introduce Mr. Val Vernon, sheriff's special, from Leadville country. Mr. Vernon, with your authority will you see that no one leaves the room?"

Vernon bowed, and took his place at the door.

Then, Nell continued:

"Mr. Blakesly, senior, has this man Baxter been molesting you?"

"Ay! I have ordered his arrest for willful murder!" the villain cried, fiercely. "Officer, do your duty."

"Hold on! That man is no officer at all, and has no power to arrest. He is one of your ruffian pals, rigged out in uniform. As for arresting Uncle Redmond Blakesly, Baxy, you'd better drop that game. It won't wash. It's too heavy for you to carry!"

"Curse you, girl! What do you mean?"

"I mean that your hand is beat. Listen, while I briefly make a summary of the case:

"In the beginning you trump up a game to put your son in at Hudsonale as the real heir. You lie to an innocent girl and get her to back your case with her cash, until you eventually get it all from her. The real Jack Blakesly comes to light, and the bogus one has to bounce. You get wrathful. You seek a woman who loves money, and arrange for her to come to Hudsonale, declare herself a former Mrs. Blakesly, and exasperate Uncle Redmond to such an extent that he will attack her, when she is to back off a cliff into the river, and be drowned—in your mind! You will then step in and threaten to arrest Uncle Red unless he knuckles to your will. But you made a slight mistake in the tool you chose. A certain New York girl overheard your plan, went and sent the real Mrs. Snicker away, and, in disguise, filled the position. Later, she further carried out your plans here at Hudsonale—dodged Uncle Redmond's blow, tumbled gracefully into the river, and swam out, thus preventing any harm being done any one."

"And that was you," Uncle Redmond cried, rushing forward with extended hands.

"Well, if not me, it was some one about my size," Nell replied with a smile.

"May God ever bless you, my brave, noble child!" the old man said fervently, tears of joy streaming down his cheeks, while there was a cry of surprise and applause from all but Bax-

ter and his pal, who stood at bay, with sullen faces.

"No, don't call me your gal, fer I ain't no one but Nell Niblo, who wears trowsers in spite of fashion or famine," was the reply. "Besides, I s'pect I've found ye a better daughter than I could make. A woman gave me a letter ter fetch to you, along with the young lady, yonder, sayin' I should read it out loud. So if you'll all keep mum, I'll try to display my poor education in a fu'st class oration."

"God grant that I may not be mistaken, for I already suspect that this young woman is my long-lost Eva," Uncle Redmond said, crossing over and taking her two hands warmly in his, while Jack edged near, ready to claim a brotherly kiss.

"Well, I s'pect you're right," Nell said, tearing open the envelope. "Anyhow, here goes:

"NEW YORK, —, 187—.

"MY DEAR HUSBAND:—

"After all these years of silence and bitter repentance God has instilled into my heart the courage to write to you—a last, long letter.

"Accompanying the bearer of this message I send you our child—understand, *ours*. The child stolen from you by Colonel Baxter died in my arms, after I rescued it from his power, and I had it respectfully buried. The boy of your second marriage still lives, I have learned, a noble specimen of manhood. God grant he may ever continue in the right path through life. He is a legitimate son, for, on learning of your proposed second marriage, I procured a divorce—to save your children.

"Of myself, Redmond Blakesly, I must in justice say a few words. As true as God witnesseth this, I never was the bad woman you had reason to believe. True, I left your house and home in company with Baxter. I accompanied him on the cars to New York. He had told me you were unfaithful—shown me letters he claimed to have intercepted, addressed to other women in your hand. I became mad with jealousy, and in a condition bordering on frenzy fled with him to New York. Long ere we reached there, he insulted me, and I awoke to his devilish scheme. I denounced him, but it was too late. I knew you would never receive me at Hudsonale, so I came not back. I left Baxter at the New York station, and sought labor for my support. I could get no position, so rented me an attic-room and took in sewing. In this way, ever since, I have supported myself and child, who was born after my fatal misstep. God helping me, I have ever led a virtuous, respectable, Christian life—a life of bitter penitence and sorrow that has whitened my hairs. Our child I have reared as I would have her go—in the path of purity and righteousness, and in turning her over to your fatherly care, with the hope of your welcome for her, my earthly mission is complete. If any suspicion of my unfaithfulness yet lurks in your mind, ask Baxter. Villain and utter wretch as he is, I can but believe that he will at least do the woman justice whose ruin he sought, but failed to secure. But one thing yet I beg—let my child—our child—come occasionally and place flowers on my grave when I die. From your divorced wife,

HESTER BLAKESLY."

Uncle Redmond had staggered to a chair, and with his head bent forward, the old man wept silently.

Nor was there a dry eye in the room, except those of the colonel and his pal.

"She speaks the truth!" he said, voluntarily, in a husky tone. "As far as I have ever been able to learn, she has led a pure, unstained life—would to God I could say the same of myself.

I have plotted and am baffled. I have nothing more to say—no apologies, no prayers. I know the consequences; I will take them as they come. But, girl, there is one thing I would ask—did Fritz, the German, lay for you, and if so how did you escape?"

"Oh! as to that, Baxy, you see I am a suspicious little craft, and I smelt a big rat. So I tuk Sam Snicker, here, along with me, and instead of protrudin' our anatomy before the muzzle of an expected hostile gun, we slung out the dummy, and had the satisfaction of seeing that die an unnatural death. That's all. No one was killed through your kindly machinations. Mr. Vernon, if you have any paper to serve on this chap, there's no time like the present."

"No! no! stop!" Uncle Redmond cried, rising. "Let him go. I believe the lesson he has been taught through the instrumentality of our little detective will be the means of causing his reform, for the only redeeming act I ever knew the man to do has been to exonerate an innocent woman of a life-long wrong and disgrace which he put upon her!"

"It is not for me to say whether he shall he go or stay," Val Vernon said, stepping forward. "True, I am a sheriff's agent, but I have no papers to serve on these villains—no advice to give them, except to go, as there is a detective searching for them, named Monk, whose business it is to bring them to the gallows. The fortune they have inveigled from my too trusting sister I care not for, as I think the cure the lesson has given her is amply worth the expenditure."

"That settles it. Get out, while all are so lenient, or you may get your head into a noose yet," the girl detective cried. "And, above all, if you ever come to New York again, don't fool around a certain little hornet called N. Y. Nell, or it is pretty likely you'll get stung. Ta! ta! you vanquished heavy villain—skip out! The last act has told the story!"

A few words suffice to close.

Accompanied by his son, and pal, Colonel Baxter took his departure, and was never heard from thereafter.

The following day Uncle Redmond, Eva, and New York Nell left for the metropolis, and later there was a joyous reunion between the stanch old master of Hudsonale and his long-lost wife, during which all wrongs of the past were freely forgiven, and peaceful happiness brought about.

Later still Hudsonale exchanged hands, and grand homes in a Western State knew those whom our pen has favorable known—three homes, close together, where peacefully dwell Uncle Redmond and Aunt Hester—Jack and his bride, *nee* Miss Vernon, and Val Vernon and bride, *nee* Eva Blakesly.

Materially rewarded, for the services she had performed, the authoress of much of the happiness radiating those Western homes went back to New York, and since then has made a happy choice in a noble husband, who is justly proud of his wife whose experience in the detective business brought about such auspicious results!

THE END.

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